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SAINTE-BEUVE'S CRITICAL THEORY
AND PRACTICE AFTER 1849

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

THE BAKER & TAYLOR COMPANY
NEW YORK

THE CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON

THE MARUZEN-KABUSHIKI-KAISHA
TOKYO, OSAKA, KYOTO, FUKUOKA, SENDAI

THE MISSION BOOK COMPANY
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Sainte-Beuve's Critical Theory and Practice After 1849

By

LANDER MACCLINTOCK

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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Published May 1920

Composed and Printed By
The University of Chicago Press
Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.

PREFACE

It is the plan of the following study to survey and co-ordinate Sainte-Beuve's theories and practice of criticism during the latter part of his life, after his return from Liège and his "conversion" from romanticism. It is my hope to continue somewhat adequately the great work of Michaut's *Sainte-Beuve avant les lundis*.

The last generation of students of Sainte-Beuve have carefully expounded the scientific or naturalistic features of his work; but they have often neglected his aesthetic and classical criticism. I have tried to rectify the emphasis here and to exhibit the two aspects of his work in their true proportions.


I have thought it well to give the critic's ideas and practice in his own words, following his doctrine of significant quotation. This has resulted inevitably in a somewhat broken style, my phrasing being chiefly connecting links to the master's statements.

My illustrations and embodiments of Sainte-Beuve's categories, descriptions, and judgments are many, and I hope representative and comprehensive; they cannot be exhaustive. After gathering them slowly I have read the entire body of the *Causeries* and the *Lundis* rapidly and feel convinced that nothing can be found there contradictory to what is here printed—extensions, corroboration, and applications are abundant.

It is a great pleasure to acknowledge my indebtedness to my teachers in the Department of Romance Languages at the University of Chicago, and to offer my thanks especially to Professor Nitze, under whose stimulating teaching and distinguished scholarship I pursued my doctoral studies, to Professor Dargan for the benefit of his deep learning and keen criticism, and to my father and mother for much help and counsel.

L. M.

CHICAGO
May 1920



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that we ought to know whatever we can and all we can, that merely to enjoy the products of the mind does not satisfy the critical intelligence. But the critic must admit that when all these facts are known and placed in their proper relation there is yet something that escapes analysis and can be attained only through critical intuition—individual genius.

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Once the critic has explained an author or a work on scientific grounds, there arises the task of estimating the individual work itself. Is it good or bad? What is good or bad in it? Sainte-Beuve believed in attempting a final appraisal of a work or an author. He judged on the basis of five criteria: taste (his definition of taste), truth, that is to say, truth to life, tradition (his definition of *tradition*, his relations to contemporary intellectual and critical movements), logic and consistency, morality.

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treated for the right things and for all the right things; impartiality, a critical canon; the critic must allow no idea or attitude to deceive him in his search for reality; the critic, like the chemist, at the mercy of his experiment or examination, must not change or exaggerate; "preserving the tone" of the book under consideration, making the criticism as nearly as possible of the same literary atmosphere as its subject; Sainte-Beuve's doctrine of citations from authors studied; Sainte-Beuve's critical vocabulary, two of his important epithets studied, *Attic* and *Asiatic*; Sainte-Beuve's ideas on the function of literature, on *genres*, and on style.

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I. SCOPE OF THE STUDY: HISTORY OF THE SUBJECT

The plan of the following treatise is twofold: it is, in the first place, an attempt to collect from the writing of Sainte-Beuve in his third and last period those passages in which he discusses the science and art of criticism and to present them so arranged and documented as to give a coherent and, as nearly as possible, a complete view of the body of ideas that seemed to him essential for correct critical judgments. One can hardly promise that this arrangement will constitute a "critical method" or that it will take on the formal outline of a system. But it will present in natural connection the main typical dicta, the more or less deliberately formulated rules of procedure which the great critic enunciated. The plan of the treatise includes, in the second place, a study in Sainte-Beuve's own practice—being an attempt to discover whether or not, and to what extent, he applies his own announced ideas.

The third period of Sainte-Beuve's literary activity extends from the year 1849, the year of his return to Paris after his year's professorship in the University of Liège, to 1869, the year of his death. This period is peculiarly inviting to the student of criticism, because it comprises the work of the master after he had passed through his formative and tentative periods and had reached the full plenitude of his powers. Possessed of a native critical endowment which has probably never been equaled, he had passed through two phases of critical activity—had essayed two definable types of criticism—and had entered, in 1849, that wonderful stretch of twenty years of whose achievement Saintsbury says: "We shall certainly look in vain anywhere for such an example [of criticism] in quality and quantity combined as is presented by the *Causeries du lundi* and the *Nouveaux lundis*."¹ Guido Mazzoni, speaking to the same effect, says: "Tutta la serie dei *Lundis* è uno di quegli sforzi felici dove nulla appare dello sforzo; è stupenda raccolta di fatti e di guidizi, e forse il più vario ed acuto studio che sia stata intrapresa dell' anima umana."²

The two critical metamorphoses through which Sainte-Beuve passes, as well as the third and last stage at which he arrived, are described by

¹ George Saintsbury, *History of Criticism*, III (1904), 318.

² Mazzoni, *Tra Libri e Carti*, p. 379.

himself in a well-known passage in the introduction to the *Causeries du lundi*:

Au *Globe* d'abord, et ensuite à la *Revue de Paris*, sous la Restauration, jeune et débutant, je fis de la critique polémique, volontiers agressive, entreprenante du moins, de la critique d'invasion. Sous le règne de Louis-Philippe, pendant les 18 années de ce régime d'une littérature sans initiative et plus paisible qu'animée, j'ai fait, principalement à la *Revue des deux mondes*; de la critique plus neutre, plus impartiale, mais surtout analytique, *descriptive*, et curieuse. Cette critique pourtant avait, comme telle, un défaut: elle ne concluait pas. Les temps redevenant plus rudes,—j'ai cru qu'il y avait moyen d'oser plus, sans manquer aux convenances, et de dire enfin nettement ce qui me semblait la vérité sur les ouvrages et sur les auteurs.¹

Here we have his own characterization of the period that we are concerned with—he proposes “dire enfin nettement ce qui me semblait la vérité sur les ouvrages et sur les auteurs.” He would renounce polemic criticism, he would forego purely descriptive criticism, he would now seek the truth!

It was in his work on *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, of 1849, that he inaugurated his new manner and established his new aim—the attempt to find and to express freely *la vérité*—a manner and an aim that he did not alter during the succeeding twenty years, save as he achieved an ever greater freedom of thought and adopted an ever greater freedom of expression. It is in this volume that we have the first unmistakable foreshadowings of the critical revolution of which Sainte-Beuve was the prophet and the leader.

It would seem, in view of the general recognition by the critics of the three periods with a radical change of point of view in each period, and especially in view of Sainte-Beuve's own statement outlining them, that no further defense were needed for the plan of studying the third period as a separable unified field. And the period shows an unbroken unity so far as regards his critical theory. The growing freedom in the expression of his opinions may have been due partly to external conditions. He became more independent socially and economically; having been appointed a senator with a fairly good salary he was not obliged to write for money, and having attained the dignity of an officer of the empire he may have felt that he was beyond the range of personal spite or professional revenge. But the unifying force that holds the period together is something deeper, more permanent, and more organic than the freedom he enjoyed in expressing his opinions. This deeper unifying

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 2.

force we must try to isolate and identify. Levallois says that in spite of the wide variety of Sainte-Beuve's subject-matter, there is a "secret procédé et un persistant instinct" which "a présidé à l'économie de cette construction et qui en a réglé les détails."¹ When one comes from a fresh and closely consecutive reading of the *Causeries du lundi* and the *Nouveaux lundis*, he sees that the unity running through the two series owes little to any external sameness of treatment—indeed there seems to have been almost a conscious avoidance of monotony—but is a matter of unity of thought and point of view, very broad, indeed, and very rich in detail, but definitely consistent.

Another feature of the period particularly enticing to the student of criticism is the fact that as Sainte-Beuve grew older he displayed more and more pride and interest in his art; he took his function as critic more seriously; he interpreted it more profoundly; he philosophized more about it; and he analyzed its processes more expertly. To be impressed with the growth of his consciousness of his vocation as a critic, one has only to contrast the low estimate made of the critic in the article, "La critique sous l'Empire"² written in 1850, with the lofty ideal of the critic, the pioneer of art, the preserver of taste, the aid and co-worker of the artist, presented in the last volume of the *Lundis*, in an article of 1858.³

We are not surprised, then, to find that the *Nouveaux lundis* contain much more critical philosophy than the *Causeries du lundi*; but this increased amount of theorizing does not represent a change of mind—it is crystallization. Sainte-Beuve was gradually clarifying his ideas—as an expert he was generalizing from multitudes of specific instances—and the ideas were those that he retained and upon which he proceeded throughout his third period.

To collect and classify the important and significant dicta that Sainte-Beuve made about criticism and the critic in this, his great period, in all moot and pivotal matters giving his own words; to determine whether or not he observed in practice the principles he laid down in theory—this is the hope and plan of this dissertation.

From many points of view there has as yet been made no adequate complete study of the works of Sainte-Beuve. Most of his critics do not take sufficiently into account the division of his work into the three

¹ Jules Levallois, *Sainte-Beuve* (1869), pp. 100 ff.

² *Causeries du lundi*, I, 371: "M. de Feletz et de la critique littéraire sous l'empire."

³ "De la tradition en littérature," *ibid.*, XV, 356 ff.

periods; even those who are most aware of the division do not bring into clear relief the radical distinctions between the three sections of his work. Many of the studies are sketchy and merely literary, and therefore, from the point of view of scholarship, inadequate; many of them become entirely absorbed in the striking, as one may say, the sensational aspects of Sainte-Beuve's work to the neglect of its other aspects; many of them present bodies of opinion which, however interesting and seemingly sound, are not accompanied by those citations and quotations which would enable the student to verify and test them.

Those books which, because they contribute something new and characteristic, have been found most useful and suggestive, are considered here in chronological order.

The article of Edmond Scherer in his *Études critiques sur la littérature contemporaine*,¹ though written as early as 1863, remains one of the most valuable studies of Sainte-Beuve. But Scherer's view was necessarily incomplete, since he wrote before the completion of the critic's work. Besides, his treatment is not of sufficient length or scope to call for extensive analysis or comment.

Jules Levallois, in his *Sainte-Beuve*,² devotes to the *Causeries du lundi* and the *Nouveaux lundis* some twenty-five pages, which, however, are almost exclusively taken up with describing, expounding, and criticizing the account of Sainte-Beuve's method which he himself gives in the *Nouveaux lundis*.³ This account is important, but seen in the right perspective is by no means sufficiently inclusive or profound to be taken, as Levallois takes it, as the sole basis for the discussion of Sainte-Beuve's method. As a matter of fact, in this famous passage Sainte-Beuve is describing only one phase of his thought—that which finds expression in his naturalistic criticism—and Levallois, apparently assuming that it is an account of the great critic's complete system, has no great difficulty in offering objections to it, finding faults in it. Many of Levallois' objections are specious and would have been modified by a little further reading in Sainte-Beuve himself. It should be self-evident that no consideration of Sainte-Beuve can be adequate that takes as its text any one statement of his critical intention, no matter how emphatic and detailed the statement may be. The passage that Levallois is content to examine is interesting and important, but it must be

¹ Edmond Scherer, *Études critiques sur la littérature contemporaine*, I (1863), 321.

² Levallois, *Sainte-Beuve* (Paris, 1872).

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 1 ff., article on Chateaubriand.

supplemented by the examination of scores of passages, some confirmatory and some contradictory, and must be checked and balanced by a knowledge of the critic's total thinking.

Brunetière, in his *Évolution de la critique*,¹ is very helpful and illuminating and more satisfying in his treatment of Sainte-Beuve than is Levallois, because he takes into account the aesthetic side of the critic's work. As a matter of fact, not Levallois only, but most writers on Sainte-Beuve have sacrificed the aesthetic side of his work to the naturalistic and scientific side. Brunetière, however, makes too sharp a distinction between the two series, *Causeries du lundi* and *Nouveaux lundis*, when he asserts that it was only in the later series that Sainte-Beuve put forward final conclusions, when he again refused to allow "que la critique se réduisît à n'être que l'expression des jugements; ou des goûts personnels du critique."² This admission Sainte-Beuve did not make once during the whole of his last period, as is amply proved by evidence offered in another connection in this dissertation.

Brunetière is sound in his insistence upon the general unity of thought holding the period together. His treatment suffers from the misleading condensation inseparable from the handling of so large a topic in a few pages.

Emile Faguet's account in the *Politiques et moralistes*³ is also less extensive than it should be and is not adequately documented. It is a popular account of Sainte-Beuve, attempting to cover the whole of his work in one article. Like all such attempts, it is foredoomed to incompleteness in the treatment of this third period. Faguet, in his reaction against systematizing, falls into the other extreme and writes this statement, for example: "Du reste, à la fin de sa vie, Sainte-Beuve n'était plus, à proprement parler, un critique, si ce n'est par exception et comme par divertissement." He amplifies by explaining that Sainte-Beuve was a moralist and a psychologist, not a literary critic. He undoubtedly does good service in laying stress on this side of the critic's activities, but his statement is without the proper reservations and seems to imply that Sainte-Beuve was not at all times a critic of literature—a misleading implication, since in this last period, as indeed throughout his career, he was primarily interested in the art of literature and the literary artist. A complete, co-ordinated reading of all Sainte-Beuve's work will, we believe, correct the impression made by Faguet.

¹ F. Brunetière, *L'évolution de la critique* (Paris, 1890), p. 234.

² *Ibid.*, p. 237.

³ Emile Faguet, *Politiques et moralistes* (Paris, 1899), III, 185.

Gustave Michaut, in the last chapter of *Sainte-Beuve avant les lundis*,¹ gives a study of *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*. Sainte-Beuve collected the material in this book for a course of lectures which he offered in the year of his professorship at Liège, 1848-49. It is not surprising that some of the ideas which later found full expression in the essays are foreshadowed and some even quite clearly embodied in the *Chateaubriand*. Michaut examines the critical technique of this volume, concluding that, allowing for the larger scope of the book, it is not different in technique from the essays.

The two poles of Sainte-Beuve's critical world are, according to Michaut, taste and truth, and by them he orients himself, whatever book or man he has before him for study. Though we shall be obliged, after a survey of the great critic's later work, to add to these cardinal standpoints for judgment three more categories of equal importance—tradition, logic or consistency, and morality—yet this chapter of Michaut's monumental work is penetrating and sound. He analyzes extensively the scientific attitude of Sainte-Beuve and his doctrine of scientific criticism, developing further the ideas of Levallois, both following indeed the outline made by Sainte-Beuve himself in the essay mentioned above.²

But Michaut limits himself to the earlier work. His material lies strictly in the years *avant les lundis*. This present treatise will apply to the late work the same sort of intensive study with a view to deducing in addition the principles that Sainte-Beuve developed within the *Lundis*. As a matter of course, some of the ideas expounded will coincide with those that Michaut found—Sainte-Beuve did not abrogate all his earlier principles. It is the hope of this thesis to supplement and complete, not to supersede, the *Sainte-Beuve avant les lundis*.

Saintsbury, in his voluminous *History of Criticism*,³ gives a fairly full account of Sainte-Beuve. As is usual with Saintsbury, the essay is full of whims and subject to affectations, and the sketch is literary rather than technical. But below this surface we find one of the most inspiring accounts of the master that have been written. It is especially valuable for its clear and firm outline of Sainte-Beuve's working principles and for its picture of the organization of a typical or standard *Causerie*.

¹ Gustave Michaut, *Sainte-Beuve avant les lundis* (Fribourg et Paris, 1903).

² *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 1.

³ Saintsbury, *A History of Criticism* (Edinburgh and London, 1904), Vol. III.

There remain for special mention the two latest important books in English: *Sainte-Beuve*, by George McLean Harper; and the section on Sainte-Beuve in Irving Babbitt's *Masters of Modern French Criticism*. Harper's book¹ is especially valuable as biography and traces the events of Sainte-Beuve's later life in close connection with his literary production. Harper is, in many respects, of the school of Sainte-Beuve himself, and lays his main emphasis on the more personal and intimate aspects of his subject. Consequently he makes no extended attempt to gather and systematize all of Sainte-Beuve's ideas on criticism. The earlier chapters, dealing with the critic in his formative period, are more exhaustive and helpful than are the later ones. In these latter there is great compression and the confusion that comes from treating in a small space so vast and complex a subject as the critic's ideas and practice during the last twenty years of his life.

The chapter in Babbitt's book² was written from a distinct point of view, that of treating Sainte-Beuve as a naturalistic thinker, a Darwinian, an exponent of the scientific trend of the nineteenth century. But Babbitt has a firm grasp on the versatile and volatile mind of Sainte-Beuve, and he makes clear in a few most trenchant and convincing pages the essential contradiction between the master's humanistic instincts and his scientific convictions which led him to his attempt, or perhaps his dream, of making criticism both a science and an art. Babbitt also discusses from a modern philosophical and literary point of view some of the more prevalent of Sainte-Beuve's critical ideas and points out authoritatively and definitely the excellences and defects, the powers and limitations, of the great critic. Babbitt's article contains the most masterly writing yet done concerning the later Sainte-Beuve.³

The foregoing list is brief because only those books were chosen, from among the hundreds that make up the bibliography of the subject, which have contributed something new and distinctive in method, in material, or in philosophy to the discussion of Sainte-Beuve after 1849.

¹ George McLean Harper, *Sainte-Beuve* (London and Philadelphia, 1909).

² Irving Babbitt, *The Masters of Modern French Criticism* (Boston and New York, 1912), pp. 97 ff.

³ In a discussion and evaluation of Sainte-Beuve's later ideas and practice, it seems questionable to justify and illustrate conclusions by so many quotations of material from his early works, especially the *Portraits littéraires*, as early as 1832-38.

II. THE FUNCTIONS OF CRITICISM

The attempt to resurvey and unify the thought of a great writer is of course to be approached with modesty and some misgiving. The task is the more formidable if the writer be one so voluminous and so multifarious in his interests as is Sainte-Beuve. He himself knew well the difficulties of such an undertaking: "Il est difficile, en général, de ramener à l'unité l'œuvre éparsée d'un critique; il est délicat surtout de prétendre saisir le point central et le noyau de ces organisations de plus d'étendue que de relief."¹ He felt that his own mind was of the kind he described—"de plus d'étendue que de relief." "J'ai l'esprit étendu successivement, mais je ne l'ai pas étendu à la fois. Je ne vois bien à la fois qu'un point ou qu'un objet déterminé."² But the difficulties are challenging and the possible reward inviting.

Our first question then is as to the teaching of the great critic concerning the most fundamental problem of criticism, its functions. And because of its constant recurrence and strong emphasis there can be no doubt that Sainte-Beuve regarded as the most important function of criticism the discovery and proclaiming of truth. Nor is this to him so inclusive and formless a task as it might at first appear. When we examine the details of his thinking on this point we find it definite and practical. He had taken for his seal the English word "truth," which represents both *la vérité* and *le vrai*. He said: "If I had a motto, it would be the true, the true alone, and as for the good and beautiful, they might fare as best they could."³

But his scientific positivism, as it appears in the search for truth and in sense of fact, is so modified by his philosophy of flux and by the humanistic generosity of his sympathies that he has frequent moments of misgiving, such as is voiced in this passage: "Qu'est-ce que la vérité? Nous sommes de pauvres esquifs qui ramons sur la mer sans fin. Nous montrons quelque reflet de lumière sur la vague brisée, et nous disons: *c'est la vérité*."⁴ If this has a skeptical pragmatic ring it is because Sainte-Beuve conceived of truth as relative and contingent; it is not

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, V, 459.

² *Cahiers*, p. 39.

³ *Correspondance*, II, 41. Of the book on Chateaubriand: "Je n'ai voulu qu'une chose; être *vrai* et rendre le vrai" (*ibid.*, I, 267).

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, XI, 514.

philosophic, idealistic, unfunctioning truth that he seeks, but *la vérité vraie* of the scientist, factual truth and fidelity of detail. This he feels is not easy to find; yet it is less difficult to find it than to secure its acceptance.¹ "Pauvre vérité, vérité vraie, vérité nue, que de peine on a à te faire sortir de ton puits et quand on est parvenu à t'en sortir à demi et à mi-corps, que de gens accourus de toutes parts qui ont hâte de t'y renfoncer."² Thus half jestingly does he state the profound and profoundly discouraging fact that even in matters purely literary, people hate the truth and cling lovingly to illusion.³ He was convinced that the large number of persons who were offended by his volume on Chateaubriand were so offended because they were not able or willing to face the truth. "'Je suis convaincu depuis longtemps,' m'écrivait à ce sujet un étranger qui sait à merveille notre littérature, 'que pour presque tout le monde, la vérité dans la critique a quelque chose de fort déplaisant, elle leur paraît ironique et désobligeante; on veut une vérité accommodée aux vues et aux passions des partis et des coteries.'"⁴ It is precisely this "accommodated" truth that Sainte-Beuve often deprecated, which indeed he condemned as a most pernicious form of falsification. It must be acknowledged here, however, as will be pointed out elsewhere, that in his own practice he sometimes tempered the wind of critical severity with more than a modicum of mercy.

Ignoring the suffering of those who are deprived of their beloved illusions, and disregarding those who may visit their displeasure on the iconoclastic critic, he must make it his first concern to seek with exact and scrupulous care the truth—to handle the facts from which he is to draw his truth as the chemist handles his data; more than once he compares *l'analyse critique* with *l'analyse chimique*, assuming that the two processes might ideally be equally exact.⁶

He embodies these ideas in the following significant passage on the rôle and activity of the genuine critic:

Le sage et le critique qui a d'avance purgé son esprit de toutes les idoles et de tous les fantômes ... ne continue pas moins, chaque jour et à chaque

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, VIII, 161: "La vérité est difficile à bien établir et à fixer en tout, et particulièrement en histoire."

² *Cahiers*, p. 139.

³ Sainte-Beuve often asked himself whether it were not better to allow a certain amount of this illusion to remain undisturbed.

⁴ This is undoubtedly the "friend" whom Sainte-Beuve quotes whenever he has anything to say that he does not dare to say in his own person. It is needless to point out that it is a purely rhetorical device and is quite commonly used by Sainte-Beuve.

⁵ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 265.

instant, de servir à sa manière l'avancement de l'espèce, d'étudier, de chercher le vrai, le vrai seul, de s'y tenir sans le forcer, sans l'exagérer, sans y ajouter, et en laissant subsister, à côté des points acquis, tous les vides et toutes les lacunes qu'il n'a pu combler.¹

The fact that Saint-Beuve is here speaking of scholarship, of erudition, rather than more narrowly of criticism, does not lessen the weight of the passage; for in his mind there is no chasm between scholarship and criticism, since learning is an essential item in the critic's equipment, and the mastery of the field in which his subject-matter lies a necessary first step in the critic's total procedure.

The passion for the truth of exactness he recognizes as a distinctively modern trait, the product of the scientific movement; he contrasts the point of view arising from this essentially new procedure with that of the ancients whose ideal in the writing of critical history was beauty: "L'art était la forme la plus haute sous laquelle l'antiquité aimait à concevoir et à composer l'histoire"—the aim and ideal for example of Tacitus and Livy; on the contrary, "la vérité est la seule loi décidément que les modernes aient à suivre et à consulter. La vérité, toute la vérité donc! Passons par là puisqu'il le faut et allons jusqu'au bout tant qu'elle nous conduit."²

It seems plain in this and in many other passages quite as emphatic that when Sainte-Beuve says *la vérité* he means truth to facts—factual and scientific, not abstract, truth—truth, that is to say, in the Aristotelian, not in the Platonic, sense. And with this view of criticism he tends logically to make of it a science rather than an art. That is to say, he views it as a science so far as thought and content go; in matters of form, criticism being a branch of literature, he provides for the element of art. Just here may be found, as Babbitt points out,³ the generating center of that conflict and incongruity so constantly found in Sainte-Beuve's thinking; it lies in the adjustment or the maladjustment between his humanistic instincts and ideals on the one hand and his scientific convictions and knowledge on the other. Under the sway of the one he seems to say that criticism is as artistic as poetry; under the sway of the other, that it is as scientific as chemistry. How he effected a harmonious or at least a working compromise between the two views may appear later. Our concern here is with his insistence upon the scien-

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, IX, 105.

² *Ibid.*, III, 303.

³ Babbitt, *The Masters of Modern French Criticism*, p. 135.

tific scrupulousness and completeness called for in gathering the information necessary for a well-grounded criticism:

Nous tous, partisans de la méthode naturelle en littérature et qui l'appliquons chacun selon notre mesure à des degrés différents, nous tous, artisans et serviteurs d'une même science¹ que nous cherchons à rendre aussi exacte que possible, sans nous payer de notions vagues et de vains mots; continuons donc d'observer sans relâche, d'étudier et de pénétrer les conditions des œuvres diversement remarquables et l'infinie variété des formes de talent; forçons-les de nous rendre raison et de nous dire comment et pourquoi elles sont de telle ou telle façon et qualité plutôt que d'une autre, dussions-nous ne jamais tout expliquer, et dût-il rester, après tout notre effort, un dernier point et comme une dernière citadelle irréductible.²

This last sentence gives us an example of those apparent vacillations that seem to overtake the great critic in his most earnest defenses of a purely scientific criticism; for here in the implied admission that there are reaches of an author's work closed to scientific investigation and open only to intuitive penetration he seems to abandon his case for science.³ But this admission does not invalidate his claim as to the necessity of gathering, in a strictly scientific way, the facts and all the facts, though this process must in many cases be supplemented by an intuitive activity of the sympathetic critic which functions beyond the horizon of science.

The establishment of truth has two aspects, complementary and of almost equal importance. Obviously, of course, it brings to light actual facts, verifiable knowledge; but in the second place it destroys false traditions, disposes of untrue and unreal conceptions, blasts baseless illusions, and clears out other useless and dangerous rubbish: "L'histoire (même littéraire) transmise est presque toujours factice; à nous de briser la glace, pour retrouver le courant."⁴ It is apparent at once that, just because Sainte-Beuve is a critic and not a literary appreciator or expounder, and because he is dealing with a vast number of reputations irregularly and popularly established, he finds more work to do in the destruction of wrong critical impressions and conclusions than in the establishment of new facts and fresh points of view.

¹ Notice the word "science" used here. Cf. his "science of minds," etc., in the second section.

² On Taine's *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* in *Nouveaux lundis*, VIII, 88.

³ Sainte-Beuve did not hesitate to contradict himself. Elsewhere he even speaks of the right of the critic to "dire, redire, et se contredire" (*Correspondance*, II, 370).

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, XI, 494.

This will explain and justify much of his destructive criticism—he is a new, critical Cervantes. To find the main current of truth is a prime motive of the critic; to re-establish real facts about a writer and to clear away from his reputation the mass of fictitious legends and merely attributed excellences which grow up about any considerable reputation—“inventions ... que la critique n'admet pas”—this he must do without pity.¹

The critic's search for truth leads him to go deeper than external superficial facts in the hope of finding the inner mental spirit of the age or the man he is studying. He will refuse to accept for serious consideration superficial appearances, absurdities, and falsehoods, even though they bear the stamp of age and long acceptance. These things the critic brushes aside for the sake of going directly at the central, generating, significant features of his book, his man, or his epoch. Sainte-Beuve in his own practice never hesitated at this point.² Indeed he seemed to find a righteous joy in the destruction of traditions which he regarded as embodying falsehood, regardless of their antiquity or their respectability—this in addition to a certain malicious satisfaction he derived from the very process of disillusionment.

The critic's care for the truth is concerned even with the delicate and difficult matter of truth to atmosphere. Sainte-Beuve felt that the first step in creating the true atmosphere is to find in the man his *trait saillant*: “C'est ainsi ... qu'il faut, en définitive, juger des grands hommes, sans s'amuser aux accessoires, et en s'élevant jusqu'au point qui domine en eux les contradictions et les travers.”³ By placing the emphasis on this salient or distinguishing trait he brings his subject at once into the true light;⁴ he will not hesitate to tear away the veils of

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, V, 219. Sainte-Beuve goes on here to express regret that in the interests of the truth these legends which are sometimes most beautiful should have to be destroyed. “Si nous détruisions la légende, il semble que nous devrions nous mettre en peine de la remplacer aussitôt.” But it is the artist in him who feels this regret and the artist is glad for the sacrifice for the benefit of the scientist.

In another place he expresses a similar doubt as to the expediency of destroying popular beliefs. “Il en est des personnages célèbres comme des choses, la majorité des hommes, ne les juge qu'à un certain point de perspective et d'illusion. Est-il bien nécessaire de venir ruiner cette illusion, et de les montrer par le dedans tels qu'ils sont, en leur ouvrant devant tous les entrailles? Je me le demande, et pourtant je le fais” (*Causeries du lundi*, XI, 461).

² *Causeries du lundi*, XI, 517.

³ *Ibid.*, III, 185.

⁴ It would have been easy for him, he says, to have made a more favorable portrait of M. Bazin but “je crois que la plus grande faveur qu'on puisse faire à un homme

accumulated legend that obscure the true figure;¹ he must display it with its faults and virtues, its limitations and qualifications;² he must disregard affection and predilection—all in order that the way may be cleared for the presentation of the particular and characterizing originality of the man or the book, "montrer à tous en quoi consistent l'innovation et l'espèce de découverte réelle charmant artiste."³ He sums up his teaching on this point when he says that he has studied Villemain with a view to presenting him as he is:

Les gens de lettres, les historiens et prêcheurs moralistes ne sont-ils donc que des comédiens qu'on n'a pas le droit de prendre en dehors du rôle qu'ils se sont arrangé et défini? faut-il ne les voir que sur la scène et tant qu'ils y sont? ou bien est-il permis, le sujet bien connu, de venir hardiment, bien que discrètement, glisser le scalpel et indiquer le défaut de la cuirasse? de montrer les points de suture entre le talent et l'âme? de louer l'un, mais de marquer aussi le défaut de l'autre, qui se ressent jusque dans le talent même et dans l'effet qu'il produit à la longue? La littérature y perdra-t-elle? c'est possible: la science morale y gagnera.⁴

The critic should resolutely clear away from his author this overlay of legend and popular overestimation even at the risk of incurring the reprobation that Sainte-Beuve says he endured because of his iconoclasm in respect to Chateaubriand. But the honest and fearless critic "ne prétend rien ôter que de faux, on ne veut y remettre que la vérité de la physionomie et l'entière ressemblance."⁵

When he has isolated the *trait saillant* or has identified the *faculté maîtresse* the critic has then the privilege and the duty of placing the author in the great literary scheme, and thus recording for his generation, if not for all time, what he feels to be the truth:

Le devoir de chaque génération est d'enterrer ses morts et de célébrer plus particulièrement ceux qui ont droit à des honneurs distingués. Quand

distingué ... c'est de le montrer le plus au vif qu'on peut, et le plus saillant dans les lignes de la vérité (*ibid.*, II, 484).

He says elsewhere that he writes of Tocqueville in order to present the real man and "prendre, autant que je le pouvais, la mesure de l'homme, avant qu'il passât à l'état de demi-dieu par le fait de l'apothéose académique" (*Nouveaux lundis*, I, 150).

¹ His own most extensive unveiling was perhaps the *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*. He says also of C. G. Etienne: "Dans ce qu'on a écrit jusqu'à présent sur lui, je remarque bien des choses convenues, et commandées, qui masquent un peu la physionomie véritable; je n'ai aucune raison pour ne pas restituer quelque chose ici, d'autant plus qu'il doit s'y mêler bien des éloges" (*Causeries du lundi*, VI, 474). He says the same thing of Raynouard in *Causeries du lundi*, V, 2.

² *Causeries du lundi*, II, 286.

⁴ *Correspondance*, I, 316.

³ *Ibid.*, VIII, 414.

⁵ *Nouveaux lundis*, I, 187.

je dis célébrer, je n'entends pas cette louange uniforme et banale qui tend à grandir et à exhausser un personnage au delà du vrai; la meilleure oraison funèbre, la seule digne des gens d'esprit qui en sont l'objet, est celle, qui, sans rien surfaire, va dégager et indiquer en eux, au milieu de bien des qualités confuses, le trait distinctif et saillant de leur physionomie."¹

It is also wise "revenir de temps en temps sur les diverses époques littéraires, même celles qui ont été déjà très-explorées et qui sont censées les mieux connues, pour y constater les changements introduits par le cours des études, pour enregistrer les acquisitions réelles et faire justice des prétentions peu fondées."²

The first function of criticism, then, is the establishment of truth, basing it upon the fullest collection and consideration of facts, weeding out the irrelevancies and inventions, establishing, in a word, history indubitable and as complete as possible.

This brings us to the second function of criticism, which is, in the phrase of our own day, "social betterment," the actual amelioration of social conditions, the improvement of social institutions, and the development of a social psychology. These operations take place in two fields, in that of morals and ideas, and in that of aesthetics.

After every social upheaval literature must help to rebuild the edifices of society, and criticism must aid in this rehabilitation.

Toutes les fois qu'après un long bouleversement l'ordre politique se répare et reprend sa marche régulière, l'ordre littéraire tend à se mettre en accord et à suivre de son mieux. La critique (quand critique il y a) ... accomplit son œuvre, et sert à la restauration commune.³

Malherbe accomplished such a task after the Ligue, Boileau after the Fronde. In 1800 it was the critical small change of Malherbe and Boileau "qui remirent le bon ordre dans les choses de l'esprit et firent la police des Lettres."⁴ Perhaps Sainte-Beuve hoped to render some such social service when after the *coup d'état* of 1851 he rallied with such extraordinary promptness, though with none too great cordiality, to the standard of the new empire in his article "Les Regrets," published in 1852.⁵

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, V, 440. Sainte-Beuve might have added "by pointing out and emphasizing their *faculté maîtresse*."

² *Ibid.*, IV, 289.

³ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 374.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 374. Sainte-Beuve does not often admit even this much virtue in neo-classical ideas.

⁵ *Ibid.*, VI, 397. Cf. Harper, *Sainte-Beuve*, pp. 310 ff., who describes the hatred which Sainte-Beuve brought on himself by this article.

Sainte-Beuve gives also specific instances of the helpful ministrations of the critic in the case of a diseased mental life, a spiritual malady such as was the *mal de René*. It was St. Marc Girardin, says Sainte-Beuve, who did more than anyone else toward the cure of this particular malady in the minds of the youth of France, both by his writing as a critic and by his lectures at the university.¹ Indeed Sainte-Beuve whimsically complains that Girardin did his work too thoroughly, so that whereas previously every young man longed to die of consumption, in his day every young man desired to become a healthy *père de famille* and a deputy at twenty-five.

The critic is in so real a sense a guardian of the morals of society that he must be depended upon to discountenance infringements of moral law and order. Sainte-Beuve censures Grimm severely for his failure to condemn certain immoral works of the eighteenth century—of Helvétius and Holbach.² So seriously does he regard this aspect of the critic's work that we find morality counted by him as one, though a minor one, of the five *pierres-de-touche* which he himself used in testing the excellence of any book, according to which he praised it as helpful or condemned it as dangerous to society. Of course Sainte-Beuve recognizes the relativity of moral codes and ideals, and he refrained from setting up a hard-and-fast doctrine on which the critic can completely depend.³

A further service of the critic to society is rendered when he saves it from becoming the prey of the charlatan, from being imposed upon by the egotists, self-seekers, and demagogues. Sainte-Beuve himself possessed in remarkably large measure the "wisdom of disillusion" requisite for the discharge of this duty.⁴ He feels that he rendered some such service to the public of his day when in his two monumental volumes on Chateaubriand he spoiled the pose of that eminent poseur. It was his delight, as he considered it his duty, to demolish pedestals.

But above all, the distinctive service of the critic to his age and his group is that of cultivating taste in literature and the other arts; of preserving and making operative in the social mind whatever of good taste and good usage has been handed down from former times; of protecting the best tradition, proclaiming the best models; of constantly indicating the path by which beauty and distinction may be reached.⁵

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 17.

³ On morality as a critical touchstone, see p. 67.

² *Ibid.*, VII, 323.

⁴ Babbitt, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

⁵ Cf. Matthew Arnold: "It is the critic's business to see that the intellectual current of his time is broad and large, and that it moves in the right direction." See *Essays in Criticism*, pp. 1-38; also the article "Sainte-Beuve," *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

In Sainte-Beuve's judgment the functions of the critic here coincide with those of the scholar and the teacher, since it is equally their task to discover, conserve, and propagate true distinction, to join forces against the legions of the Philistines who know not if there be a tradition. To the critic, however, falls the further task of discovering and proclaiming new achievements in art and of welcoming innovations good enough to be added to the world's storehouse of precious things.

In his famous essay "De la tradition en littérature" Sainte-Beuve gives in great detail his sense of the critic's duty toward this large and sacred social inheritance—in France inherited even from the mighty Hellenic days. This it is that the critic must help to keep uncorrupted and active. He should be, therefore, an agent, explosive or erosive, in removing those accretions that gather about and disfigure tradition and which from age to age become useless "à chaque renouvellement de siècle, il y a dans la tradition récente qu'on croyait fondée des portions qui s'écroulent, qui s'écroulent, en quelque sorte, et n'en font que mieux apparaître dans sa solidité le roc et le marbre indestructible."¹ He draws an interesting picture of this clear tradition which the critic must cherish as the embodiment of urbanity and reason.²

The Graeco-Roman clarity and intelligence are actuating principles also of the Frenchman:

Non, la tradition nous le dit ... , la raison toujours doit présider et préside en définitive, même entre ces favoris et ces élus de l'imagination; ou si elle ne préside pas constamment et si elle laisse par accès courir la verve, elle n'est jamais loin, elle est à côté qui sourit, attendant l'heure ... de revenir. C'est de cette religion littéraire que nous sommes, au milieu même des plus vives hardiesses, et que nous voulons être toujours.³

Not only does the critic guard and preserve this tradition, but by making it audible and active he performs a most important function—cultivating the taste of his public, preparing them to receive and to demand what is good in art. There must be taste to receive as well as to create before there can be a movement, a great productive moment, in any art. In a very real sense the receptivity of the public is as creative as the inspiration of the artist.

That the critic can and may serve groups and movements of artists is proved by the case of Henri Beyle, the "literary hussar," and his

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, XV, 373.

² *Ibid.*, XV, 362. See later, p. 60, where there is a fuller discussion of his attitude toward the classical tradition.

³ *Ibid.*, XV, 368.

victorious campaign against the army of the classicists encamped on the right bank of the river Public Opinion in favor of the army of the romanticists on the other bank of this same stream.¹

The critic's whole duty is not discharged when he has served the public, his social group. He has also the privilege of serving the individual artist himself:

Le critique, s'il fait ce qu'il doit ... est une sentinelle toujours en éveil, sur le qui-vive. Et il ne crie pas seulement *holà!* il aide. Loin de ressembler à un pirate et de se réjouir des naufrages, il est quelquefois comme le pilote côtier qui va au secours de ceux que surprend la tempête à l'entrée ou au sortir du-port.²

He was, however, not slow to admit the limitations of the service that the critic can render to the artist—he cannot create genius:

La critique, à chaque renouvellement de régime, peut essayer et combiner des programmes qu'elle croit utiles; elle peut proposer et recomposer ses plans d'une littérature studieuse et réparatrice ... c'est son devoir; mais l'imagination, la fleur, l'inspiration de la passion et du sentiment, lui échappent: cela naît et recommence comme il plaît à Dieu.³

He never forgets that ideally "un critique est aussi un praticien qui prend l'art où il est—et qui en tire le meilleur parti" as did "Diderot, ce critique cordial et réchauffant."⁴ His admiration of Diderot as a critic had precisely this basis—that the latter was practically always in sympathy with the artist, which is on the whole the most fruitful and trustworthy attitude the critic can take: "Les conseils de critique à artiste sont utiles, mais ils ne valent rien que s'ils sont accompagnés d'une sympathie intelligente."⁵ It is in this spirit—as friend and well-wisher—that he himself criticized Flaubert's *Salammô*: "On n'est jamais jugé que par ses amis," he exclaims in another connection.⁶

But this sympathetic attitude must not, of course, blind the critic to the less agreeable aspects of his duty. He must not lend himself to the zealous championship of his artist. He must not be afraid to condemn severely, to point out faults, especially curable faults. Indeed, Sainte-Beuve seems to feel frequently in this later period of his work that when the critic is in perfect agreement with the author there is nothing for him to say. "Il en est ainsi de la critique: elle tourne court

¹ *Ibid.*, IX, 316. This whole passage is very instructive as to the function of the critic.

² *Ibid.*, XV, 373.

³ *Ibid.*, V, 381.

⁴ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 99.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁶ *Cahiers*, p. 79.

et s'en va quand elle est d'accord avec l'auteur."¹ The exaggeration in this statement is obvious, but the truth which forms its basis records the change that came over Sainte-Beuve's critical theory as he grew more experienced, and attests the distance he had traveled from the merely inductive criticism of his early romantic period. His insistence on the duty of the critic to serve the public and to act as friend and helper to the author is so striking that one is obliged to feel that Sainte-Beuve was profoundly influenced by the socializing and humanitarian movements of his day. In fact we know that at one time he joined the Saint-Simon cult of humanitarianism.² He recognized the prevailing current of his century: "chaque siècle a sa marotte, le nôtre ... a la marotte humanitaire."³

The beneficial influence of the critic upon the author may be of the greatest moment. It is to Boileau, to his services as arbiter and critic, that Sainte-Beuve attributes much of the excellence of *le grand siècle*. The passage in which he does this is so important in itself and so adequate a statement of the point under discussion that it may be quoted at some length.

Saluons et reconnaissons aujourd'hui la noble et forte harmonie du grand siècle. Sans Boileau, et sans Louis XIV qui reconnaissait Boileau comme son Contrôleur-général du Parnasse, que serait-il arrivé? Les plus grands talents eux-mêmes auraient-ils rendu également tout ce qui forme désormais leur plus solide héritage de gloire? Racine, je le crains, aurait fait plus souvent des *Bérénice*; La Fontaine moins de *Fables* et plus de *Contes*; Molière lui-même aurait donné davantage dans les *Scapins*, et n'aurait peut-être pas atteint aux hauteurs sévères du *Misanthrope*. En un mot, chacun de ces beaux génies aurait abondé dans ses défauts.⁴ Boileau, c'est-à-dire le bon sens du poète critique, autorisé et doublé de celui d'un grand roi, les contient tous et les contraignit, par sa présence respectée, à leurs meilleures et à leurs plus graves œuvres. Savez-vous ce qui, de nos jours, a manqué à nos poètes, si pleins à leur début de facultés naturelles, de promesses, et d'inspirations heureuses? Il a manqué un Boileau et un monarque éclairé, l'un des deux appuyant et consacrant l'autre. Aussi ces hommes de talent, se sentant dans un siècle

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, I, 337.

² Michaud, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

³ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 16.

⁴ This is exactly what happened in the case of Le Sage: "Qu'on se figure Molière n'ayant pas à côté de lui Boileau pour l'exciter, le gronder, lui conseiller la haute comédie et le *Misanthrope*; Molière faisant une infinité de *Georges Dandin*, de *Scapin*, et de *Pourceaugnac* en diminutif. C'est là le malheur dont eut à souffrir Le Sage, qui est une sorte de Molière adouci. Il n'eut pas à ses côtés l'Aristarque et s'abandonna sans réserve aux penchants de sa nature, et aussi au besoin de vivre qui le commandait" (*ibid.*, II, 371).

d'anarchie et d'indiscipline, se sont vite conduits à l'avenant; ils se sont conduits, au pied de la lettre, non comme de nobles génies ni comme des hommes, mais comme des écoliers en vacances. Nous avons vu le résultat.¹

The excesses that Chateaubriand permitted himself in the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* occur because he lacked the critical offices of his Aristarchus, Fontanes, who had saved him from similar mistakes in his other works.² Honoré de Balzac, too, the superabundant and flamboyant, stood in sad need of a friendly critic-mentor. "Un Aristarque vrai, sincère, intelligent, s'il avait pu le supporter, lui eût été pourtant bien utile; car cette riche et luxueuse nature se prodiguait et ne se gouvernait pas."³ He expresses the wish that his own counsels may be of service to Flaubert and save him in the future from some of the extravagances of *Salammbo*: "S'il lui arrivait seulement de tenir compte, dans un livre futur, d'une ou deux observations essentielles que nous lui aurions faites avec tout un public ami, ce serait un résultat."⁴ He had little confidence in the power of the artist to control his own exuberance,⁵ and for this reason he attributes so much value to the restraining influence of a firm and sympathetic critic.

The author is partly dependent on the good offices of the critic in the matter of the establishment and advancement of his reputation. It is often within the province of the critic to redress the balance for an author who is not receiving the credit due him. Sainte-Beuve felt himself to be reaching a helping hand to Scherer when he wrote: "M. Scherer lui-même avait peut-être besoin d'être signalé ... et j'ai tenu à le faire sans retard; c'était justice à la fois et plaisir; j'aime assez à sonner le premier coup de cloche, comme on sait."⁶ He performs with equal pleasure the same service for many other authors,⁷ exercising the function he claimed for the critic—the discovering and proclaiming of new talent or of the less well-known aspects of recognized talent. Indeed, a favorite type of essay with him is that which handles some unknown aspect of a well-known writer. He liked to introduce a famous novelist as a writer of plays, a philosopher or statesman as an epistolary writer, or more frequently some great artist or other celebrity merely as a man, approaching him by the intimately biographical path.

¹ *Ibid.*, VI, 511.

² *Ibid.*, I, 436; see also *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, II, 118 ff.

³ *Ibid.*, II, 456; cf. also p. 457.

⁵ Babbitt, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

⁴ *Nouveaux lundis*, IV, 72.

⁶ *Causeries du lundi*, XV, 66.

⁷ E.g., Mme de Swetchine; see *Nouveaux lundis*, I, 210.

This service, so valuable to a living author, may be useful in the case of one no longer living—by “placing” him definitely. His own generation is too close to him adequately to bring to light the real facts about him. Too often a writer’s memory is laden with undeserved and unessential reproach. Sainte-Beuve proposes to perform the task that the writer’s own generation cannot fulfil, for instance for Béranger’s correspondence which he thinks had been misunderstood and misjudged.¹ Something like this he did for Grimm;² for Mme de Staël who had so much critical influence for good and who had received so little credit.³ Writing of the Président Jeannin he says: “Pour moi, je n’ai voulu, selon mon habitude, que payer ma dette envers une mémoire à la fois considérable et non toutefois populaire et vulgaire.”⁴

The effect of the reviving of forgotten writers and the rediscovery of neglected works is sometimes profound; the restoration of Bossuet was of the nature of a triumph. “La restitution de Bossuet ... est assez considérable en soi; c’est une assez belle conquête de la critique historique.”⁵

The importance which Sainte-Beuve attributed to this process of rehabilitation and the pleasure he had in bringing to light neglected or forgotten aspects of art or qualities of men explain in part the fact so often noticed concerning him, that he neglected the greatest, choosing minor writers for his subjects. Certain critics have even inferred from this that he was incapable of rising to the high level upon which the great artists should be criticized. But instead of inability or perversity in him there are other considerations sufficient to explain Sainte-Beuve’s choice. In the first place there are cases in which he is interested in the author as a representative and a product of his society.⁶ And it is a well-known fact that a minor writer offers a clearer and simpler example in this case than a great one, since the great man is more than a mere expression of an epoch. In the second place, the critic may have occupied himself with less well-known men because it was they who needed recognition and introduction, whereas the supreme geniuses did not.⁷

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, I, 165.

² *Causeries du lundi*, VII, 307.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 292.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, X, 178. He makes a similar statement concerning the reputation of Mme de Swetchine. *Nouveaux lundis*, I, 210.

⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 356.

⁶ Cf. Babbitt, *op. cit.*, p. 155; Harper, *op. cit.*, p. 321, and *infra*, “Precepts and Procédés,” p. 85.

⁷ *Causeries du lundi*, IV, 515.

What he says of Montesquieu he feels to be true of all writers of first rank: "Il en a été excellemment parlé par des maîtres, et il est inutile de venir répéter faiblement ce qui a été bien dit une fois."¹ Sainte-Beuve found a very congenial task in his essays on the literary women of the eighteenth century, reclaiming for literature all those who were influential either through their writing or through their salons.

J'ai cru et je crois encore payer une dette délicate, remplir un devoir de politesse ... envers des personnes rares, si brillantes à leur heure, si fêtées et méritant de l'être, mais dont la mémoire, pour peu qu'on néglige d'en recueillir avec quelque précision les témoignages et les traits distinctifs, se dissipe de loin, s'efface peu à peu et s'évanouit.²

But it is equally the duty of the literary critic to allow the merciful pall of oblivion to cover those minor writers who have neither originality nor representative value. Sainte-Beuve would have deplored the practice of modern scholars who unearth and perpetuate insignificant writers, better forgotten. The critic here needs much learning and well-trained powers of discrimination, for the mere fact that he occupies himself with a bygone or neglected name assures for it some prominence and a certain measure of immortality; he should therefore select with much care only those who are worthy.³ "Et enfin fût elle en pure perte, cette insistance de la critique, même lorsqu'elle n'approuve pas, est encore une manière d'hommage. ..."⁴

To sum up what Sainte-Beuve conceived to be the critic's service to the artist: (1) he may actually improve the author's production by counsel and advice; (2) he may establish or augment the author's reputation, of the living as of the dead; (3) he prepares the public to receive and appreciate the author's work; (4) he especially works to revive and re-establish those undeservedly neglected or forgotten.

The critic's service to the reader⁵ begins in helping him to choose good reading and continues in assisting him to grasp and then to appreciate the thing he has chosen.

L'art de la critique, en un mot, dans son sens le plus pratique et le plus vulgaire, consiste à savoir lire judicieusement les auteurs, et à apprendre aux autres à les lire de même, en leur épargnant les tâtonnements et en leur dégageant le chemin.⁶

¹ *Ibid.*, VII, 41.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

² *Nouveaux lundis*, IV, 163.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁵ *Causeries du lundi*, VI, 321. He calls critics *serviteurs du public*.

⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 278. Again he says: "Le critique n'est qu'un homme qui sait lire et qui apprend à lire aux autres" (*Portraits littéraires*, III, 546).

* The critic or expert is able to save the reader the difficult labor of choosing among those works that have survived or are worthy to survive in the evolutionary struggle.

La postérité, de plus en plus, me paraît ressembler à un voyageur pressé qui fait sa malle, et qui ne peut y faire entrer qu'un petit nombre de volumes choisis. Critique, qui avez l'honneur d'être pour la postérité du moment un nomenclateur et un secrétaire,¹ et, s'il se peut, un bibliothécaire de confiance, dites-lui bien vite le titre de ces volumes qui méritent que l'on s'en souvienne, et qu'on les lise; hâtez-vous! le convoi s'apprête, déjà la machine chauffe, la vapeur fume, notre voyageur n'a qu'un instant.²

The critic is finally a sentinel, an outpost on the lookout for new talents, and to his sharpened critical senses he must add a certain gift of divination, that he may perceive promise when fulfilment is still far off.

Il est des organisations délicates ... qui sentent vingt-quatre heures à l'avance les changements de temps, qui les devinent en quelque sorte; tel doit être l'esprit du critique par rapport au jugement du public. Il faut que sa montre avance de cinq minutes au moins sur le cadran de l'Hôtel-de-Ville.³

Yet this does not mean that the critic is in any sense a prophet or a soothsayer: "Le critique n'a pas le don de deviner le talent caché qui n'a pas encore jailli."⁴

The critic further serves the reader by virtue of the fact that he is able as a scholar and an expert to sum up and condense a book or a larger corpus of material so as to convey to the reader knowledge that the latter could never gather for himself. The critic constitutes himself a guide through a difficult and inaccessible region: "Rien n'est agréable et piquant comme un guide familier dans des époques lointaines. On y apprend d'une manière facile mille choses nouvelles; les réflexions naissent à chaque pas d'elles—mêmes,"⁵ etc. His duty to the reader may be merely that of informing him, the discharge of his office of scholar; it may be pedagogical or editorial, as when he sums up, interprets, rearranges, or otherwise prepares the material for the mental digestion

¹ Elsewhere he uses this same phrase about the critic, "Le critique n'est que le secrétaire du public, mais un secrétaire qui n'attend pas qu'on lui dicte, et qui devine, qui démêle et rédige chaque matin, la pensée de tout le monde" (*Causeries du lundi*, I, 373).

² *Ibid.*, IV, 515. Cf. also, where he uses this same figure of the reader resembling a traveler, *ibid.*, VII, 89, and Voltaire's "on ne va pas à la postérité avec de si gros bagages."

³ *Portraits contemporains*, V, 457.

⁴ *Cahiers*, p. 143.

⁵ *Causeries du lundi*, VIII, 495.

of the reader;¹ or psycho-social, as when he prepares the mind of the reader for the reception of what literature has to give him.² "Mais les hommes pour la plupart ne savent pas eux-mêmes quel jugement porter; ils ont besoin d'une marque extérieure qui les rassure."³

The critic has an unmistakable duty in those cases, by no means rare, where he becomes possessed of important information or vital points of view which are not common property. "Il me semble que quand on sait quelque chose de particulier et d'un peu nouveau sur Racine, on n'est pas libre de le garder pour soi et qu'on le doit à tous."⁴ This is particularly true if it happens, as it often does, that the important knowledge lies imbedded in some obscure or esoteric place, difficult of access to the popular reader, so that to his social obligation the critic must add a pedagogical or exegetical duty.⁵

But the reader, and especially the public of readers, may be indifferent or even hostile to the critic and anything but grateful for his assistance. Sainte-Beuve was frequently deeply discouraged by this—so deeply that he has words in which he questions the value of his art: "Il n'est pas invitant de s'aller engager dans un long combat, dans une joute inégale, non-seulement avec la certitude d'être finalement vaincu, mais de plus avec l'assurance qu'on sera déclaré inférieur à tous les moments du duel."⁶ In such moods he bitterly resented the refusal of the public to be guided, as well as the arrogant assumption of the chance ignoramus, who considers himself as good a judge of literature as the trained expert.⁷ It must have been in some such mood that he wrote the essay "De Feletz et de la critique littéraire sous l'empire,"⁸ which has been made so much of by students as a repudiation by Sainte-Beuve

¹ This informational function he himself exercises, for example, in the case of the Provençal poet Jasmin. "Il y a toute une moitié de la France qui rirait si nous avions la prétention de lui apprendre ce que c'est que Jasmin, ... mais il y a une autre moitié ... qui a besoin ... qu'on lui rappelle ce qui n'est pas sorti de son sein," etc. (*Causeries du lundi*, IV, 309).

² "Ce n'est pas une réhabilitation que je viens tenter, mais il est bon de mettre des idées exactes sous de certains noms qui reviennent souvent" (*ibid.*, IV, 121). He is going to speak again of Saint-Simon's *Mémoires*. "Il ne peut être question ici que de rappeler et de fixer avec netteté quelques-uns des points principaux acquis désormais et incontestables" (*ibid.*, XV, 423). "Je voulais seulement, sur ce terrain littéraire qui est neutre ... amener les uns et les autres à être plus justes," etc. (*Nouveaux lundis*, I, 81).

³ *Cahiers*, p. 72.

⁶ *Nouveaux lundis*, V, 334.

⁴ *Nouveaux lundis*, X, 356.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

⁵ See also p. 76.

⁸ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 373.

of his office as critic.¹ He indubitably takes in this essay a low view of his art and calling. He goes so far as to say that criticism of itself can do nothing unless the public is already friendly, that the critic is merely the secretary of the public, divining what the public thinks or desires and giving it that. Nevertheless this is not his normal doctrine, rather a mere *boutade* written in an hour of discouragement and disgust.

A summary of his views of the relation of the critic to the reader displays these points: he gives aid and guidance in the selection of things worth knowing; he purveys information—knowledge and point of view—otherwise difficult of access; he prepares the mind of the reader for the reception of great works; he regrets and resents the slowness of the untrained reader to accept the guidance of the expert.

Finally the function of criticism is to afford a medium for the creative faculty of the critic himself, to constitute that opportunity of self-expression indispensable for the born critic. Central in Sainte-Beuve's critical theory was the doctrine that there is a native critical faculty. So important is this doctrine that it will have to be approached from several sides within this dissertation. Criticism, he says, is a temperamental thing, a disposition of the mind, not a profession.² He himself could not avoid being a critic; it was his call, his *dæmon*. "Comment ai-je eu dès mon enfance une vocation littéraire si prononcée?" His bent was, he feels, an inheritance from his father and "dès l'enfance j'aimais les livres, les notices littéraires, les beaux extraits des auteurs."³ He tried to be a poet but his instinct was stronger than his will or his ambition. Though he at first regretted his failure as poet, as he grew older he became more and more convinced that he was essentially and by nature a critic:

A mes yeux, il n'est point d'honneur plus grand pour une intelligence humaine que de saisir et d'embrasser l'ensemble de vérités qui constituent les lois des nombres et des mondes. Après la gloire de faire des découverts ... il n'est rien de plus honorable, que de se rendre compte directement de ces découvertes ... et de les pleinement comprendre.⁴

This particular passage he writes apropos of the pleasure he derives from penetrating the thoughts and sympathizing in the discoveries of the astronomer Arago; and he receives the same delight always in the

¹ Gayley and Scott, *Literary Criticism*, p. 35.

² This is discussed more fully *infra*, "The Qualifications of the Critic."

³ *Cahiers*, p. 64.

⁴ *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 92.

presence of masterpieces of pure literature. When asked why he delighted to study the women of the past, he replies:

Plaisir désintéressé de la curiosité critique! dernière jouissance de ceux qui ont beaucoup vécu dans leur chambre, qui ont beaucoup lu et peu agi! Quoi de plus doux et de plus innocent, en effet, que de s'occuper ... d'une existence disparue, de ressaisir une figure nette et distincte dans le passé ... de donner tous ses soins, pour la recomposer et la montrer aux autres, etc.¹

No one who realizes the full significance of such a statement, remembering that it is the voice of a born and predestined critic, could indorse for a moment Balzac's phrase applied to Sainte-Beuve, *poète avorti*.

As a sort of corollary of the doctrine that criticism is self-expression, the free and spontaneous activity of a native impulse, Sainte-Beuve is led to declare that criticism is itself a creative activity: "La critique, telle ... que je voudrais la pratiquer est une *invention* et une *création* perpétuelle."² He explains what he means by the phrase *création perpétuelle*:

Le plus beau rôle pour le critique c'est quand il ne se tient pas uniquement sur la défensive, et que, dénonçant les faux succès il ne sait pas moins discerner et ... prémouvoir les légitimes. C'est pour cela qu'il y a dans le critique un poète; le poète a le sentiment plus vif des beautés, il hésite moins à les maintenir.³

The critic is a creator also in the sense that, taking a passage or a citation from his author as a point of departure, he discovers beauty and significance, present only by implication or even by mere possibility, which it may not have occurred to the author to utter.⁴ It is clear that Sainte-Beuve anticipated in many respects the more modern ideas of creative criticism.

"Depuis que la critique est née ... elle n'aime guère les œuvres de poésie entourées d'une parfaite lumière et définitives; elle n'en a que faire. Le vague, l'obscur, le difficile, s'ils se combinent avec quelque grandeur, sont plutôt son fait."⁵ Because, then, the critic can explain, can create, can think his own thoughts within the horizon of the book:

Nos idées sur les poètes ont, en effet, changé presque entièrement, depuis quelques années ... il s'agit du fond même ... et des principes habituels en vertu desquels on sent et l'on est affecté. ... Autrefois, durant la période littéraire régulière, dite classique, on estimait le meilleur poète celui qui avait composé l'œuvre la plus parfaite, le plus beau poème, le plus clair, le plus

¹ *Ibid.*, IX, 434.

² *Portraits Littéraires*, III, 546.

³ *Chateaubriand*, II, 116.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 305.

⁵ *Nouveaux lundis*, X, 391.

agréable à lire. ... Aujourd'hui on veut autre chose. Le plus grand poète pour nous est celui qui, dans ses œuvres, a donné le plus à imaginer et à rêver à son lecteur. ... Le plus grand poète n'est pas celui qui a le mieux fait; c'est celui qui suggère le plus ... il ne lui (la critique) déplaît pas de sentir qu'elle entre pour sa part dans une création.¹

Diderot set the example in France of this creative and interpretative criticism. It was said of him that he never met a wicked man or read a bad book. "Car si le livre était mauvais, il le refaisait, et il imputait, sans y songer, à l'auteur quelques unes de ses propres inventions à lui même. Il trouvait de l'or dans le creuset, comme l'alchimiste, parcequ'il l'y avait mis."²

The creative activities of the critic find scope and occasion also in presenting the masterpieces of the classics; there is here legitimate need for imaginative interpretation, and the classics must be, as it were, retranslated into the consciousness of each new generation. Sainte-Beuve in a very illuminating passage indicates the province and limitations of such creative writing. He is speaking of Don Quixote:

Certes je suis trop critique pour nier les droits de la critique. On peut de loin, à distance, et en envisageant l'ensemble d'une œuvre, en embrassant d'un coup d'œil les conséquences qu'elle a eues, ... on peut y reconnaître autre chose et plus que l'auteur tout le premier n'était tenté d'y voir, et plus, certainement, qu'il n'a songé à y mettre. *L'Iliad* et *L'Odyssée* signifient et représentent pour nous assurément plus de faits et d'idées à la fois que pour les chantes homériques qui les ont récitées par branches, et pour ces populations primitives qui les ont entendues. Mais cette part légitime de pensées et de réflexions qu'ajoute incessamment l'esprit humain aux monuments de son héritage intellectuel, cette *plus-value* croissante qui a pourtant ses limites, doit être soigneusement distinguée de l'œuvre elle même en soi, bien que celle-ci la porte et en soit le fond. Elle ne doit point surtout être imputée et prêtée à l'auteur primitif par une confusion de vues et une projection illusoire de perspective. Sachons bien que nous devenons, à la longue, des *coopérateurs*, des *demi-créateurs* dans ces types consacrés, qui, une fois livrés à l'admiration, se traduisent et se transforment incessamment. Sachons que nous y ajoutons, de notre chef, des intentions que l'auteur n'a jamais eues, comme par compensation de toutes celles qu'il a eues en effet, et qui nous échappent.³

The critic is *demi-créateur* and *coopérateur* by virtue of the fact that he is constantly reinterpreting masterpieces in the light of new ideas, stating universal ideas in terms of the modern consciousness, bringing out meanings implicit in the material but of which the original author was scarcely conscious, and continually re-thinking the material in order

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, X, 390.

² *Causeries du lundi*, III, 300.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, VIII, 36.

to disclose all that the author meant to put into it. "La critique a fort raisonné de nos jours et de tout temps sur la pensée fondamentale qui se montre ou se dérobe dans *Don Quichotte*, et il n'en pouvait être autrement; c'était son droit. Que serait la critique si elle ne raisonnait pas?"¹

Would it not be fair to say that Sainte-Beuve's ideas of the function of criticism may, in general, be summed up in the two passages which follow? "Renouveler les choses connues, vulgariser les choses neuves: un bon programme pour un critique."² "La critique pour moi ... c'est le plaisir de connaître les esprits, non de les régenter."³

To conclude, however, more in detail and in the order of the material offered in this section, the functions of criticism in Sainte-Beuve's view are: (1) to seek the truth, and as a pendant to this (2) to destroy false traditions and legends, to overturn fallacious and fictitious standards, to expose illusory ideals and sentiments; (3) to serve society morally and artistically by cultivating taste and by maintaining the right traditions; (4) to serve the author by actual reproof and advice, by enhancing his reputation, by introducing him to an audience, and if he be dead by rehabilitating him if he is undeservedly forgotten; (5) to serve the reader and the reading public by giving them actual information and points of view they could not get for themselves, by selecting for them their reading or guiding them in a wise selection, by preparing their minds for the reception of what is good; (6) and to satisfy the passion of the critical genius for self-expression and artistic creation.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

² *Causeries du lundi*, XI, 512.

³ *Cahiers*, p. 11.

III. SCIENTIFIC CRITICISM

A man of Sainte-Beuve's wide outlook and knowledge of his intellectual age, of his keen curiosity, could not have failed to feel the pervading scientific movement of his century. As a matter of fact, he was profoundly interested in it and felt that its methods and principles in the largest and most detailed observation of facts, its emphasis on heredity, environment, evolution, and on new aspects of causation must all be applied in criticism. He had himself studied medicine, and he said of his training in this subject: "It is to this [study of medicine] that I owe the philosophical spirit, the love of precision and of physiological reality, and whatever good methodical procedure my writings, even my literary writings, possess!"¹ While we see in this some exaggeration of the value of his studies in medicine, we may well believe that they helped to enhance in him instincts, powers, and habits that developed his scientific, "physiological" criticism.

Sainte-Beuve was aware that in adopting certain points of view of science he was not conforming to the historic and conventional French technique of literary criticism; he was quite aware that he was breaking with the Boileau-La Harpe tradition, and directing his art into paths which these masters could not have trodden. He intended to make literary criticism as nearly a science as could be; he endeavored to base his opinions on facts and, as far as possible, to determine the exact and efficient causes of his phenomena, all in consonance with what he regarded as the modern spirit:

Nous sommes déjà si loin de ces temps (ceux de Louis XIV), que, pour bien juger d'un homme, d'un auteur qui y a vécu, il ne suffit pas toujours de lire ses productions, il faut encore les revoir en place, recomposer l'ensemble de l'époque et l'existence entière du personnage.²

He thinks, it appears, that it is no longer sufficient, having read a book, to deliver one's verdict on it as good or bad on the strength of one's internal response alone—things are not the same in this scientific age as in other times—the unsupported and undefended conclusions of taste have lost authority; we must have more than opinions; we must have facts and explanations.

¹ Harper, *Sainte-Beuve*, p. 72.

² *Causeries du lundi*, I, 453.

La température morale n'est plus la même; le climat des esprits est en train de changer. D'où je conclus, ... que la littérature critique se trouve en présence d'un monde nouveau ... il y a nécessité pour elle de se renouveler d'ailleurs. ... Plusieurs écrivains, ... ont donc senti le besoin de varier et d'accroître leurs moyens, de perfectionner leurs instruments ... afin de pouvoir lutter avec les autres arts¹ rivaux et pour satisfaire à cette exigence de plus en plus positive des lecteurs qui veulent en tout des résultats. De là l'idée qui est graduellement venue de ne plus s'en tenir exclusivement à ce qu'on appelait la critique du goût, de creuser plus en avant qu'on n'avait fait encore dans le sens de la critique historique, et aussi d'y joindre tout ce que pourrait fournir d'éléments ou d'inductions la critique dite naturelle ou physiologique.²

Here the word is uttered! *La critique naturelle ou physiologique* must be united with the *critique historique* and the *critique de goût pur* to make the new synthetic art of the new age. It is not the office of the newly added elements to supplant the old, but to give the new combination a firm foundation, to make of it a science.³ It is noticeable that Sainte-Beuve never excludes taste from a share in his judgment; but he reduces it from the position of supreme arbiter to that of one of a tribunal of arbiters.

The first step in the critical process is to gather the facts, all the facts, about an author and his book. Then on the basis of these facts with the aid of our own literary feeling we may form and deliver an opinion. Since we must have the aid of this personal literary feeling, criticism cannot ever be called a pure science but must retain elements of art and demands the service of an artist.⁴ Nevertheless, Sainte-Beuve warns us repeatedly that this artist must bring to bear on his subject-matter as much of scientific method as he can; he must reduce the margin of the operation of personal taste. Such a worker using such a system would be the ideal critic. "Il y a lieu plus que jamais aux jugements qui tiennent au vrai goût, mais il ne s'agit plus de venir porter des jugements de rhétorique. Aujourd'hui l'histoire littéraire se fait comme l'histoire naturelle, par des observations et par des collections."⁵ Out of this scientific attitude toward criticism comes his

¹ Notice, however, that here he classifies criticism as one of the arts.

² *Nouveaux lundis*, IX, 69.

³ "Corneille a été, dans ces dernières années, et il est plus que jamais, en ce moment, l'objet d'une quantité de travaux qui convergent et qui fixeront définitivement la critique et les jugements qu'elle doit porter sur ce père de notre théâtre. Les jugements de goût sont depuis longtemps épuisés et ils ne seront pas surpassés" (*ibid.*, VII, 199).

⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, IX, 69; III, 67.

⁵ *Portraits littéraires*, III, 546.

distinctive contribution to literary theory. "I am," he says elsewhere, "a botanist of minds"; and he felt that his critical essays were all studies of specimens, of which, however, because science was not far enough advanced, he was not yet able to make a satisfactory classification:

... elle [la science du moraliste] en est aujourd'hui au point où la botanique en était avant Jussieu, et l'anatomie comparée avant Cuvier, à l'état, pour ainsi dire, anecdotique. Nous faisons pour notre compte de simple monographies, nous amassons des observations de détail; mais j'entrevois des liens, des rapports, et un esprit plus étendu, plus lumineux et resté fin dans le détail, pourra découvrir un jour les grandes divisions naturelles qui répondent aux familles d'esprits.¹

In effect, this *esprit plus étendu, plus lumineux* will be able to make criticism approach the character of a natural science.

Indeed to Sainte-Beuve a science of criticism was already emerging.² The critic says that he is beginning to see "des liens, des rapports," and that with the wide application of the historical method the connections will become clearer. The latter half of the important article, "Qu'est-ce qu'un classique,"³ is devoted to making a general classification of the families of minds as he saw them.⁴ It is only in modern times and under the influence of the spirit of scientific investigation and in the light of our consequently wider knowledge that classification so definite has become possible or conceivable.

It was Chateaubriand who inaugurated in France the type of comparative-historical criticism, and he was followed by Saint-Marc Girardin and others.⁵ Of his own method Sainte-Beuve says: "J'aime, au reste, à marier ces productions, par quelque côté parentes, bien plutôt qu'à les opposer: La Bible de Royaumont, le *Télémaque*, Rollin, *l'Homère* de Mme Dacier, me paraissent aller bien ensemble pour la couleur."⁶ This describes the comparative-historical aspect of that scientific criticism which Sainte-Beuve desired to found. He regards this point of view as a distinctive contribution of his own age. It is a

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 17.

² We are just arriving, he thinks, by the use of the historical method at a point where we can really judge. "Les critiques (d'autrefois) ... ne s'informaient pas assez à l'avance de tout ce qui pouvait donner à leur jugement des garanties d'exactitude parfaite et de vérité" (*Causeries du lundi*, XV, 375).

³ *Ibid.*, III, 38 ff., dating from 1850.

⁴ This correspondence in ideas between the "Chateaubriand" article of 1862 (*Nouveaux lundis*, III) and the "Qu'est-ce qu'un classique" article of 1850 (*Causeries du lundi*, III) is a clear indication of the unity of his thought during this period.

⁵ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 12.

⁶ *Ibid.*, IX, 491.

step toward the explanation of an author and his book on the basis of fact. It will help to insure us against being made the dupe of an unfounded and extravagant admiration, and will save the author from becoming the victim of an ill-founded hostility:

... qu'y a-t-il de plus légitime que de profiter des notions qu'on a sous la main pour sortir définitivement d'une certaine admiration trop textuelle à la fois et trop abstraite et pour ne pas se contenter même d'une certaine description générale d'un siècle et d'une époque, mais pour serrer de plus près, d'aussi près que possible ... l'analyse des caractères d'auteurs aussi bien que celle des productions ?¹

It is not sufficient to explain the book—one must go back of that and explain the author. This notion of the obligation to study the author behind the book is also, Sainte-Beuve says, a product of his own century. He traces in a sentence the history of this idea in France. Mme de Staël gave it currency in her *De la littérature*; certain of the journalist critics, notably those on the *Globe*, and later M. Villemain, follow her lead. Nowadays "on essaye de faire un pas de plus et toutes les fois qu'on le peut, d'interroger directement, d'examiner l'individu-talent dans son éducation, dans sa culture, dans sa vie, dans ses origines."²

More recent critics have been more thoroughgoing than Mme de Staël, who merely outlined the method. Among those who followed on the road faintly blazed by her, Sainte-Beuve mentions Michelet, Renan, Taine, Eugène Héron; and he adds: "J'y suis moi-même entré depuis bien des années, et en affichant si peu d'intention systématique, que beaucoup de mes lecteurs ou de mes critiques ont supposé que j'allais purement au hasard et selon ma fantaisie."³ He himself especially developed the path of biographical criticism. But as he here unmistakably implies, he did not proceed *au hasard* or *selon sa fantaisie*; and, though we may find no hard-and-fast method, we shall expect to find, to use Taine's distinction, a definite critical procedure.

It would seem clear from the foregoing statements chosen from many of like tenor that Sainte-Beuve realized the need of a scientific criticism; that he recognized certain aspects of it in recent and contemporary critics; that he outlined its aspects or qualities; that he believed himself to be an exponent of it. The peculiarly "scientific" principle of his critical performance we now know had to do with the gathering and sifting of data and with the placing of the author and the book in the proper genus. This we shall follow in detail in this section. The more

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, IX, 71.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

peculiarly aesthetic critical activities that succeeded these naturalistic steps in his total process will occupy us later.

In the article of 1862¹ on Chateaubriand Sainte-Beuve gives a detailed account of the side of his work we are now to study. This authoritative account we will follow in detail, reinforcing it with striking passages of confirmation or amplification from sources other than the "Chateaubriand."² As a text for the whole discussion the following passage might be taken: "Tout a son prix aux yeux de la critique qui sent l'art comme l'expression presque directe de la nature et de la vie."³ Thus Sainte-Beuve sees his first task in finding out all he can about life, that life of which the book is the living expression. We shall try to reproduce in our presentation of Sainte-Beuve's analysis the thoroughly logical order of his procedure.

First, he says the work of art cannot be separated from its author—"tel arbre, tel fruit"—consequently the first requirement toward the appreciation of a book is the understanding of its author.⁴ One may like or dislike a book, but one cannot fairly and finally judge it without a knowledge of its sources—the author and his life. Inevitably, then, the study of literature leads to the study of psychology.⁵ There are, of course, cases where the complete study of an author is impossible—the great writers of antiquity, for example, who appear to us as titanic torsos and scattered limbs, and whom therefore we can only partially know. Even in this case, however, we must take all the more pains to gather all that we can lay our hands on in the way of facts. In the case of the moderns we can, of course, get at the essential circumstances of their lives and environment. "La biographie bien comprise et bien maniée est un instrument sûr pour initier à l'histoire des hommes et des temps, même les plus éloignés de nous."⁶ Sainte-Beuve gives in the following passage an impressive summary of his scientific-biographical method:

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 15 ff.

² There are several articles which are full of this naturalistic criticism and from which the most of the supporting quotations are taken. They are: (a) "De la tradition en littérature," *Causeries du lundi*, XV (1858), 2; (b) article on Deschanel's *Essai de critique naturelle* in *Nouveaux lundis*, IX, 62 ff.; (c) on Taine's *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* in *Nouveaux lundis*, VIII (1864). Only items from *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 15 ff., come from the article "Chateaubriand."

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 289.

⁴ "Les défauts et les qualités du livre s'expliquent très-bien par la manière dont il fut composé, et par la nature d'esprit de l'écrivain" (*Causeries du lundi*, VII, 207).

⁵ "L'étude morale," as he often calls it.

⁶ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 289.

"Si l'on connaissait bien la race (physiologiquement), on aurait un grand jour sur la qualité secrète et essentielle des esprits; mais le plus souvent la race est obscure et dérobée."¹

It is clear, then, that he would start with the most fundamental things, studying the writer first "dans son pays natal, dans sa race." It need not be more than mentioned that Sainte-Beuve uses the term "race" to designate a national, not an ethnical, stock,² although there seems to be some lack of clarity on this point in his thinking. The adjectives he uses are purely national, even regional—the English race, the French, the Italian, even the Breton and Gascon—yet he also states that if we know a race *physiologically* we could determine mental characteristics, a statement which seems to concern an ethnic unit. But Sainte-Beuve did not, to the best of my belief, make any, certainly not a consistent distinction between *racial* and *national*. The race of a writer, as he used the word race, will account, on a purely physical, even physiological, basis, for many of his essential qualities. A Frenchman *quâ* Frenchman has certain characteristics that predetermine in him many fundamental qualities as writer, as reader, and as critic.³ This element of race is often hidden and elusive, "une racine obscure et dérobée"; nevertheless we must keep in mind the genius of each country:

Ne demandons pas tout à fait à chaque pays les mêmes procédés; Virgile nous l'a dit, *Nec verro terrae ferre omnes omnia possunt*. Chaque terroir a son fruit auquel il se complait. ... Assemblons, s'il se peut, tous les fruits dans notre collecte finale, et n'en écartons aucun; mais que chaque nation conserve, dans cette émulation commune, le coin de génie qui lui est propre.⁴

Another fundamental thing of equal importance with his race in determining and conditioning an author is his epoch. "Nul exemple," he says of Cervantes, "ne me paraît plus propre à montrer à quel point les hommes même énergiques, de trempe et de volonté sont assujettis et soumis au milieu où ils vivent," etc.⁵ Only certain ages could have produced certain books and they could have produced no other kind of books. So "pour bien juger des hommes de ce temps ... il importe ...

¹ *Cahiers*, p. 70.

² "Les Français, à travers toutes les formes de gouvernement et de société qu'ils traversent, continuent, dit-on, d'être les mêmes, d'offrir les mêmes traits principaux de caractère" (*Causeries du lundi*, VII, 1).

³ Mme Necker is not French, and so he says it is hard to understand and treat of her (*ibid.*, IV, 173).

⁴ *Nouveaux lundis*, XI, 182.

⁵ *Ibid.*, VIII, 38.

de se bien rendre compte du courant général, immense, qui entraînait alors la nation";¹ for, "Oui, tôt ou tard le milieu s'impose! telle scène, tels acteurs!"² Since, then, certain men and certain ideas are the product of certain centuries we must as one of the first steps study these centuries.

✕ After indicating these steps, the study of the author's race and native country, and of his epoch, Sainte-Beuve makes a digression,³ in which occur more than one of those strange shifts of focus often found in his thinking. He seems to be overtaken by a misgiving that what he has said is too strong or too narrow. In many cases these misgivings take the form of allowances or reservations more or less sweeping; in other cases they amount to irreconcilable contradictions. The digression that we have now come to in the Chateaubriand article is to the effect that criticism, no matter how exact it may be, will in some respects always remain an art, though perhaps only temporarily not a science. With the lapse of time and the exercise of limitless patience, after vast amounts of *constatation*, of just observing and recording facts, the Jussieu of physiological criticism may arrive—he who may be able to determine with completeness and exactness the families of intellects and the principles for their study. We are in a stage of the mere recording of facts; only at some later day will come the person who will definitely develop criticism into a science.

Moreover—another misgiving—there must always be in criticism some admixture of art because the doctrine of causation will always break down in the presence of mind, because in their intellectual activities men possess *ce qu'on nomme la liberté*, defying analysis and defeating expectation. No matter how logically we have constructed our chain of cause and effect, this *liberté* may break it. This constitutes the factor of individuality, and no closeness or fulness of study of his ancestry and surroundings, of his *race, milieu et moment* can finally account for a man's genius, for that something in him which no other man, though he

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, VIII, 334. Cf. "on a besoin à chaque instant, quand on étudie aujourd'hui Rollin, de se reporter à cette situation d'alentour," etc. (*ibid.*, VI, 264). "Pour bien apprécier et goûter, comme je le fais, cette correspondance de Sismondi, il faut absolument se déplacer un peu, se figurer la situation des correspondants telle qu'elle était, les revoir dans leur monde et à leur point de vue" (*Nouveaux lundis*, VI, 49). See also *Causeries du lundi*, IV, 540; VIII, 116.

² *Nouveaux lundis*, IX, 323. A man cannot with impunity be different from the essential product of his age. "C'est un malheur en tout cas pour un homme d'esprit et de talent de prendre ainsi à contre-sens l'époque dont il est contemporain, et le règne dont il serait un serviteur naturel et distingué" (*Causeries du lundi*, X, 399).

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 17.

come out of the same circumstances of time and place, possesses. At this point, says Sainte-Beuve elsewhere, begins the weakening of *la critique physiologique*:

Quelque soin qu'on mette à pénétrer ou à expliquer le sens des œuvres, ... il y aura toujours une certaine partie inexpliquée, inexplicable, celle en quoi consiste le don individuel du génie; et bien que ce génie évidemment n'opère point en l'air ni dans le vide, qu'il soit et qu'il doive être dans un rapport exacte avec les conditions de tout genre ... on aura toujours une place très suffisante ... où loger ce principal ressort, ce moteur inconnu, le centre et le foyer de l'inspiration supérieure, ou de la volonté, la monade inexprimable.¹

The genius, the irreducible personality of an author, cannot be perceived by the intellect, nor explained by any analytical process; it must be felt by the critical faculty, itself an irreducible intuition. The critic who has not this faculty cannot write a truly discerning work—*la monade inexprimable* escapes him. In this quarter, Sainte-Beuve says in another place, we will find the failure of Taine's *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, which, though a great book, is not trustworthy as literary criticism because Taine does not succeed in getting at the distinctive qualities of genius, trying as he does to explain all the men and the whole man merely on the basis of *race, milieu, et moment*.² Every author, even when not a great genius, is unique in the world. "La nature n'a fait qu'une fois un Shakespeare."³ In another place Sainte-Beuve compares the mind of the race to a great river in an image whose details suggest unmistakably that he was a scientific thinker, a Darwinian, a pre-Bergsonian, as one might say, in his doctrine of the flux. But he is careful to point out certain features in which the analogy between the river and human history fails:

"L'esprit humain," dites-vous, "coule avec les événements comme un fleuve" ... je dirai hardiment *non* en ce sens qu'à la différence d'un fleuve l'esprit humain n'est point composé d'une quantité de gouttes *semblables*. Il y a distinction de qualité dans bien des gouttes. ... Et en général, il n'est qu'une âme, une forme particulière d'esprit pour faire tel ou tel chef-d'œuvre. ... Supposez un grand talent de moins, supposez le moule ou mieux le miroir magique d'un seul vrai poète brisé dans le berceau à sa naissance, il ne s'en rencontrera plus jamais un autre qui soit exactement le même ni qui en tienne lieu. Il n'y a de chaque vrai poète qu'un exemplaire.⁴

¹ *Ibid.*, IX, 70.

² *Ibid.*, VIII, 66 ff.

³ *Ibid.*, III, 230. He means this not to contradict but to supplement his family-of-minds theory.

⁴ *Ibid.*, VIII, 86.

It is the affair of the critic to get at this unique personality—"grain of originality." In view of the fact that genius transcends the laws of inheritance and environment and defies the ordinary working of causation, and the fact that the critical faculty is also a somewhat personal and unaccountable gift, criticism, thinks Sainte-Beuve in the *Cahiers*, must always remain an art, documented, to be sure, and based on scientific principles, but in the main an art, demanding the services of a talent peculiar in the critic, as poetry demands a poet and philosophy a philosopher. The ideal critic Sainte-Beuve thus describes:

... quelqu'un qui ait ce genre d'esprit, cette facilité pour entendre les groupes, les familles littéraires, qui les distingue presque à première vue; qui en saisisse l'esprit et la vie; dont ce soit véritablement la vocation; quelqu'un de propre à être un bon naturaliste dans ce champ si vaste des esprits.¹

Thus far the digression in the Chateaubriand article; Sainte-Beuve now resumes his main theme. The studies in the race, the epoch, and in the larger natural and social background, while of essential importance, make, as it were, the frame for the portrait of the man, which the critic now proceeds to paint.

The next step, then, is to look into his immediate surroundings, the "purely biographical relationships."

Il faut étudier tout individu distingué, dans la mère, dans la sœur, dans le frère, dans les enfants même, il s'y retrouve des linéaments essentiels qui sont souvent masqués dans celui qui les combine en lui et les rassemble ... le fond se retrouve plus à nu et à l'état simple dans les parents.²

In his immediate family are to be found many of the elements that enter into the great man, to be separated out and shown "plus à nu et à l'état simple."³ One must then study his parents, more particularly his mother ("all great men," says Sainte-Beuve, "have had remarkable mothers"); one must look at his sisters, his brothers, and lastly at his children.⁴ Having thus completed the circle of kinship, one takes up the life of the man himself, his childhood, his education, and then—a matter of supreme importance—"le premier milieu, le premier groupe

¹ *Cahiers*, p. 70.

² *Ibid.* But he contradicts his own theory when he refuses to follow Michelet in studying the father and mother of Le Duc de Bourgogne, saying: "Les lois qui président aux transmissions héréditaires sont à peine entrevues, bien loin d'être de tout point éclaircies; le seront-elles jamais?" (*Nouveaux lundis*, II, 116).

³ Unless otherwise indicated, these ideas are from the article "Chateaubriand," *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 18 ff.

⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 21.

d'amis et de contemporains," which he frequented, among which he first found himself, from the midst of which he brought forth the first blossom of his talent. Every great writer retains to the end of his career the records of these early associations; the friends of that period are likely to remain the friends of a lifetime; the enemies, his lifelong enemies. This first group to which the youthful author is likely to belong (although "les très grands individus se passent de groupe") is not a fraternity or any other formal association; it is "l'association naturelle, et comme spontane de jeunes esprits et de jeunes talents non pas précisément semblables et de la même famille, mais de la même volée, du même printemps, éclos sous le même astre, et qui se sentent nés avec des variétés de goût et de vocation, pour une œuvre commune."¹ Such a *groupe* was that of Boileau, La Fontaine, and Molière; such that of the first Romantic Cénacle; another was the critical circle that gathered around Jeffrey and the *Edinburgh Review*; Sainte-Beuve names other similar groups.

At this point in the "Chateaubriand" article occurs another digression to this effect: When the critic examines a work in the light of facts of this nature, when, in the words of Sainte-Beuve, "he becomes a disciple of Bacon in literary history," he is not so likely to be taken in, *admirer de côté*, and *inventer des beautés à faux*, as he is if he confines himself to the judgments of pure rhetoric. And yet, he adds with a characteristic vacillation, this sort of judgment has its place:

Il est dangereux de s'engager trop avant dans ces minuties d'examen interlinéaire [he has just been criticizing in detail the style of Bossuet] et d'en prétendre rien conclure sur les procédés du génie; il y faudrait, en tout cas apporter un tact que tout le monde n'a pas. Tout grammairien n'est pas un critique.²

Here the fair implication is that, though dangerous, such criticism is legitimate and needful. In another passage we find this: "Ce genre de critique de détail me plaît peu—mais ..." and he proceeds with a veritable orgy of purely rhetorical criticism.³ "Je ne rénonce pas à Quintillien, je le circonscris,"⁴ he writes, meaning that he does not disapprove of the criticizing of style and rhetoric but that he rather limits its exercise and gives it a secondary place. As a matter of fact Sainte-Beuve placed more emphasis on purely aesthetic criticism than these passages would lead us to suppose, as will appear in the section of this

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

³ *Ibid.*, VII, 358.

² *Ibid.*, II, 338.

⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 24.

dissertation that deals with that side of his thought. In a measure he continues the French tradition of criticism which before the nineteenth century had been mainly rhetorical and stylistic.

Again Sainte-Beuve takes up the thread of his main discussion: We have made our study, he says, of the young author's *groupe*. The next step that will greatly reward us is to study him at the propitious moment of his first success; this takes him before he shall have acquired any mannerisms or alien peculiarities, when his talent is at its simplest. The second auspicious moment—a very instructive one for criticism—is “l'heure où il se gâte, où il se corrompt, où il déchoit, où il dévie.”¹ At this time the excess of the writer's virtue, the exaggeration of his excellence becomes a fault, and yet through its very abuse one may discover his peculiar merit. This moment of initial dissolution marks the end of a career, and it is well for an author to realize that he is declining. A normal career is fifteen years, though some men extend their successful activities through twice that period.

We must study our author, man or woman, not only mentally but physically, even physiologically, and this study will generally yield us explanations of things otherwise inexplicable.² Concerning his private life we must ask questions, some of which at first blush seem impertinent in both senses of the word:

Que pensait-il en religion? ... Comment était-il affecté du spectacle de la nature? Comment se comportait-il sur l'article des femmes, de l'argent, ... était-il riche? était-il pauvre? Quel était son régime? Quelle était sa manière journalière de vivre?³ ... Enfin quel était son vice ou son faible? tout homme en a un.⁴

“When you have to criticize a woman,” he says, “even a model of saintliness, two or three inevitable questions present themselves: Was

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 26.

² “Ce n'est plus par la logique, par l'induction, par la transformation progressive des idées qu'on peut expliquer les variations de l'abbé de La Mennais. ... Il y a eu en lui solution de continuité dans la région de l'intelligence; et c'est par la physiologie, par le tempérament qu'il le faut expliquer” (*Causeries du lundi*, XI [1836], 450). Sainte-Beuve remained of this opinion, though he wrote this passage early.

³ Taine has given a description of the daily life of Pope. “Ce n'est pas moi,” says Sainte-Beuve, “qui blâmerai un critique de nous indiquer, même avec détail, la physiologie de son auteur, et son degré de bonne ou mauvaise santé, influant certainement sur son moral et sur son talent,” etc. (*Nouveaux lundis*, VIII, 105).

⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 28. This theory of the essential vice is an important and recurring idea with Sainte-Beuve. Cf. “Nous avons tous un faible et un travers, et ce travers ..., très sensible dans notre personne, se reproduit dans nos écrits,” etc. (*ibid.*, p. 102).

she pretty? Did she ever fall in love? What was the determining motive of her conversion?"¹

The answers to these and other questions like them would enable the critic to see his author in the circumstances that led him to write as he did. "Pour bien juger Guy Patin il le faut voir en son cadre, en sa maison, dans son étude, ou cabinet."²

Inevitably the critic will go on to seek light on the author's personality and character "dans leurs livres d'abord et aussi dans le témoignage des contemporains dignes de foi."³ Out of this practice of taking the evidence of contemporaries grew what one might term the anecdotal habit of Sainte-Beuve, of the dangers of which as well as of whose service he was quite aware.⁴ Once this habit is acquired one is likely, he says, to degenerate into the telling of anecdotes for mere amusement, at any risk of triviality or disillusionment, at times merely for the gratification of an unwarranted curiosity. Sainte-Beuve claimed that these disillusioning, disenchanting stories, however, were serviceable, saving one from being made a dupe, preventing false idealization and idolizing. His belief in the usefulness of such material leads him into the recital of some anecdotes which are all but scurrilous and which cannot justify themselves by the light that they throw on the subject in hand.⁵ In his eagerness to avoid illusion and undue idealization he has plainly fallen into the opposite fault.⁶

The critic has made the necessary observations, has in hand all the necessary data. It is now the business of criticism after the analogy of chemistry to reduce the writer, if it be possible, to a formula. There

¹ *Ibid.*, I, 213.

² *Causeries du lundi*, VIII, 116.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, VII, 363. See also, "La littérature ici (à propos de Mme d'Orléans) n'a autre chose à faire qu'à enregistrer les témoignages des contemporains et, en quelque sorte à les découper au milieu des pages d'autrefois" (*Causeries du lundi*, VI, 321). See also, "L'historien, lorsqu'il a pour guide dans la suite du récit un homme d'état qui est très-intéressé dans les principales actions et qui les raconte, doit donc, à chaque pas, s'éclairer, s'il se peut, de témoignages différents et contradictoires. Le moraliste, sans négliger l'occasion du contrôle lorsqu'elle se présente, peut plus aisément s'en tenir aux discours mêmes du personnage" (*ibid.*, VIII, 155).

⁴ He quotes an anecdote about Sully and adds, "Une telle anecdote, qui n'a aucun rapport prochain ni éloigné avec les actes publics de Sully et qui ne saurait être contrôlée, est indigne d'être recueillie par un historien," etc. (*ibid.*, p. 139).

⁵ Cf. *Nouveaux lundis*, V, 142. Babbitt (*Masters of Modern French Criticism*, p. 156) cites several of such anecdotes.

⁶ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 28; cf. also *ibid.*, pp. 40 ff., where he says that it is wrong for the critic to abuse confidences.

are certain words which almost inevitably present themselves to the mind when a given person is to be weighed and summed up. "Tâchons de trouver le nom caractéristique d'un chacun et qu'il porte gravé moitié au front moitié au dedans du coeur, mais ne nous hâtons pas de le lui donner."¹ He has himself defined Chateaubriand as "an Epicurean with a Catholic imagination." "Cousin est un étourdi de génie."² "Guizot était un grand professeur d'histoire."³ But this is a very hazardous critical process. "En rassemblant ces divers faits un peu disparates, j'ai senti plus d'une fois combien le caractère d'un homme est compliqué, et avec quel soin on doit éviter, si l'on veut être vrai, de le simplifier par système."⁴ On this ground Sainte-Beuve objects to Taine's calling Shakespeare "l'imagination ou la passion pure," for such a definition is too extreme a simplification, too complete a generalization, and is not warranted by the special facts.⁵

On craint toujours, quand on généralise, d'être trop absolu; la vérité est complexe, et rarement peut-on, en tout ce qui est vivant ou historique, la résumer et la formuler d'un mot, sans qu'il faille y apporter aussitôt des correctifs et des explications qui l'adoucissent et la modifient.⁶

This looks like a contradiction of his doctrine of the formula of the few necessary words. But the reconciliation is not far to seek. What Sainte-Beuve meant by these "appellations vraies et nécessaires" was not mere specious epigrams, but summaries of the essential qualities of the particular author. Taine carried farther than Sainte-Beuve, too far the latter critic felt, the idea of the summarizing phrase based on the *faculté maîtresse* and the *caractère essentiel*.⁷

When the critic has taken all those steps by virtue of which criticism may be called a science, and has by those steps reduced his author's qualities to a formula, then he is ready to file him away, though with qualification and reserve, in the correct pigeonhole, to place him in his *famille d'esprits*.

The two doctrines, one implied in the "essential quality" or "master-passion" (the *faculté maîtresse*) of each author, and the other in the great *familles d'esprits* idea, are so basic in Sainte-Beuve's naturalistic

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, p. 30.

² *Cahiers*, p. 18.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 82. For many other examples, see *Cahiers*, *passim*; *Causeries du lundi*, XI, 441 ff.

⁴ *Ibid.*, IX, 260.

⁵ *Nouveaux lundis*, VIII, 96.

⁶ *Ibid.*, VII, 172.

⁷ See Victor Giraud, *Essai sur Taine*, 2d ed., 1902, p. 97.

criticism that it is not possible to avoid discussing them in some detail. They will be taken in reverse order.

Sainte-Beuve says: "En histoire littéraire comme en histoire naturelle, il y a le *groupe*,¹ il y a ceux que certaines analogies rassemblent, et qui ont un air de famille auquel on ne se méprend pas."² It is these analogies which in the physical world determine the classification of specimens into the great species and genera. Sainte-Beuve believes that the same thing, always making the necessary reservations, may be done in criticism—each author being supplied with a well-devised label and filed with others who have the same or closely kindred characteristics, the whole constituting a family of minds.

Babbitt,³ discussing Sainte-Beuve's theory of families of minds, raises the question as to whether he really meant a *natural* family, determined by zoölogical or organic characteristics, or something more or less unconscious. "Would," says Babbitt, "a member of a 'natural' family of mystics of whom Sainte-Beuve speaks have been a mystic if he had lived on an island in the South Sea and had never heard of St. Augustine or of Christianity?" We have not, in the first place, any statement from Sainte-Beuve explicitly pushing his principles of classification this far; and in the second place there was without doubt in his own work a confusion at this point due to his many-sided and always expanding mind. Yet he says: "The day will come when the science of physiological observation will be on a firm basis"—"où les grandes familles d'esprits et leur principales divisions seront déterminées et connues" and some day "un esprit plus étendu pourra découvrir les grandes divisions *naturelles* qui répondent aux familles d'esprits"⁴—there we have the word, *natural* division.

We find in another place this striking passage:

De même que La Bruyère a peint des caractères moraux qui font type, on arriverait ainsi à tracer quantité de portraits-caractères des grands écrivains, à reconnaître leur diversité, leur parenté, leurs signes éminemment distinctifs, à former des groupes, à répandre enfin dans cette infinie variété de la biographie littéraire quelque chose de la vue lumineuse et de l'ordre qui préside à a distribution des familles naturelles en botanique et en zoögraphie.⁵

¹ It is necessary to distinguish this *groupe* from the *groupe* he speaks of earlier, by which he means the friends and associates of a young author, "l'association naturelle et comme spontanée," he calls it. Here he means *groupe* as species, using it as a biological term.

² *Causeries du lundi*, VI, 170.

⁴ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 16.

³ Babbitt, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

⁵ *Ibid.*, IX, 80.

It is true that immediately he reveals the double-mindedness so characteristic of his thinking by saying that we shall never be able to handle minds *precisely* as we handle plants, because of the presence in the human mind of that sporadic or hybrid liberty which baffles the scientist.

Yet, as mentioned by Babbitt, he speaks definitely of the natural family of mystics.¹

It would seem then from these passages that in using the word "natural" Sainte-Beuve had in mind something that he considered scientific, some organic basis for arranging types of minds in groups.

It is obvious that some of the resemblances and kinships that he arranges could have had nothing to do with imitation or other artificial influence. In the article "Qu'est-ce qu'un classique," he makes a division, a tentative classification of the families of minds.² A study of these groups will remove the question of imitation. Here are some of his groups: Homer, Valmiki, Vyasa, Firdousi; Solon, Hesiod, Theognis, Job, Salomon, Confucius, together with La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère; Virgil, Menander, Tibullus, Terence, Fénelon; Horace, Pope, Boileau, and Montaigne; La Fontaine and Voltaire.

This family of minds created by kindred and harmonious endowments has its converse—certain men are born with mutually repellent qualities which drive them into hostile groups.³ This accounts for those natural antipathies of which Sainte-Beuve speaks—certain people working in libraries hate each other for no cause or reason, but merely because they are of opposite natures, with native animosities.⁴ He says: "Cela même, dans le détail, est assez piquant à observer; on se déteste quelquefois toute sa vie dans les lettres sans s'être jamais vus. L'antagonisme des familles d'esprits s'achève ainsi de se dessiner."⁵ Furthermore, no process can enable these opposite natures to view one another sympathetically—Taine cannot do justice to Pope;⁶ Boileau could never be taught to enjoy Quinault; Fontenelle to look kindly upon

¹ *Port-Royal*, IV, 322.

³ Babbitt, *op. cit.*, 167.

² *Causeries du lundi*, III, 38 ff.

⁴ *Nouveaux lundis*, V, 452.

⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 32. It is interesting here to note that William James held some such theory of "tough and tender" minds (*Pragmatism*, pp. 12 ff. and 263). "We have a similar contrast expressed in the pair of terms 'rationalist' and 'empiricist,' 'empiricist' meaning your lover of facts in all their crude variety, 'rationalist' meaning your devotee of abstract and eternal principles" (p. 9). The former are the tough-minded, the latter the tender-minded.

⁶ *Ibid.*, VIII, 104.

Boileau; Joseph de Maistre to love Voltaire.¹ Sainte-Beuve confesses to just such an antipathy for Saint-Marc Girardin.²

The master-faculty of an author is the main factor in determining his family of minds, for it is, for the most part, his dominating quality which urges him to that form of self-expression which determines his classification. It is his temperament, his "humor" in the Jonsonian sense.³ The master-passion, as Sainte-Beuve conceives it, is innate or at least organic. He himself, he says, was born with a passion for literature which he thinks was hereditary;⁴ the painter Horace Vernet had such a call to be a painter.⁵ This passion, perhaps innate, is inexorable in life and persists even beyond sanity.⁶ At times it is even stronger than the otherwise all-powerful *amour propre*. For Sainte-Beuve was a disciple of La Rochefoucauld to the extent of agreeing with that cynical moralist's dictum that *amour propre* is the mainspring of all action. But he did recognize that there are times and circumstances in which this *amour propre* is nullified by the action of a genuinely disinterested and irresistible master-passion.⁷

In the difficult task of isolating the master-passion one can often obtain help from the fact that at times certain authors are likely to display the vice or the virtue which is the opposite of the one that dominates them. The astute critic, taking this peculiarity in a Pickwickian sense, arrives at the real master-passion.

When one has grouped and isolated this essential principle of a man's nature, "Oh, alors on a la clef de tout," then one can safely permit himself that summary, that deduction of a formula of classification which Sainte-Beuve advocates.

One is compelled to notice that Sainte-Beuve's doctrine of the *faculté maitresse* has been far too patronizingly handled by certain recent students of his theory, and possibly it might find no place in modern psychology;

¹ *Ibid.*, III, 32.

² *Cahiers*, p. 49. On the "families of minds," cf. also *Nouveaux lundis*, IV, 314 ff., and *Causeries du lundi*, III, 2.

³ Babbitt (*op. cit.*, pp. 167 ff.) has a very good treatment of this *faculté maitresse* idea of Sainte-Beuve's.

⁴ *Cahiers*, p. 64.

⁵ *Nouveaux lundis*, V, 43.

⁶ *Ibid.*, VIII, 129. See also *Causeries du lundi*, XI, 445, where the poet is compared to a lunatic with an obsession. Sainte-Beuve, in this idea, and in the passage (*Nouveaux lundis*, VIII, 129), is following the outline in part of Pope's *Essay on Man*, which he is fond of quoting.

⁷ *Causeries du lundi*, XI, 410 ff.

but in considering Sainte-Beuve as a scientific critic it is a fallacy to condemn him in the light of science as we have it today. The term "pseudo-science" should not be lightly flung at him, seeing that in his day the science of psychology was in its cradle and the science of sociology, only slowly developing since then, not yet born. He did feel the appeal of science and he did some notable thinking under three of its great principles—observation, identification, and classification.

When the critic has finally devised his formula for an author and has classified him, it is now his affair to expand the sphere of his investigation; he must therefore study his subject's personal relations with the world, his friends and particularly his enemies, passing on, then, to his followers and disciples, who in their exaggeration of faults and vices serve as signposts to a knowledge of their master.¹ The literary children of any great man are often revelatory caricatures of their progenitor.

This completes the process. To be a scientific critic is to study an author in his race, his native country, his epoch, his family, his education and early environment, his group of associates, his first success, his first moment of disintegration, his peculiarities of body and mind, especially his weaknesses. We must determine his *faculté maîtresse*; we must glance at his imitators and disciples and learn of him from his friends and his enemies; and we must devise for him a formula and classify him in his *famille d'esprits*. In Sainte-Beuve's own words:

La vraie critique, telle que je me la définis, consiste plus que jamais à étudier chaque être, c'est à dire chaque auteur, chaque talent, selon les conditions de sa nature; à en faire une vive et fidèle description, à charge toutefois de le classer ensuite et de le mettre à sa place dans l'ordre de l'art.²

It is noticeable, we must repeat, that through all this Sainte-Beuve is concerned more with getting at the peculiar germinal principles of personality than with estimating the peculiar excellences of the work. In this connection could not these words of his concerning other critics of his time be applied to him? "Personne mieux que Goethe ne s'entendait à prendre le mesure des esprits et des génies, de leur élévation et de leur portée; il savait les étages; c'est ce que trop de critiques oublient et confondent aujourd'hui."³ Is he, too, one of those who "forget and confound" the real merits and qualities of men in the interest of more narrowly scientific explanation of tangible phenomena?

¹ "Rien ne juge mieux les générations littéraires qui nous ont succédés que l'admiration enthousiaste et comme frénétique dont tous les jeunes ont été saisis; les gloutons pour Balzac et les délicats pour Musset" (*Cahiers*, p. 34).

² *Causeries du lundi*, XII, 191.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 300.

And Sainte-Beuve is aware that there are those who will say that criticism is attempting the impossible when it tries by scientific investigation and procedure to direct and supplement the indefinable sense of taste. Such persons would say: "Je suis à table, je goûte d'un mets, je goûte un fruit: faut-il donc tant de façons pour dire: 'Cela est bon, cela est mauvais?'" Do we have to know all about a man's life and surroundings to enjoy his work? "Yes," says Sainte-Beuve, "to assume that a reader in contact with a book old or new is, or should be, like the guest who tastes a fruit that is offered him, consuming or setting it aside without knowing its nature or its origin—to do this is to treat us

en gens paresseux et délicats. Sans être précisément le jardinier en même temps que le convive, il est bon d'avoir, au sujet du fruit qu'on goûte, le plus de notions possible, surtout si l'on a charge bientôt soi-même de le servir et de le présenter aux autres. En un mot, le goût seul ne suffit plus désormais, et il est bon qu'il y ait la connaissance et l'intelligence des choses.¹

"No one," he says, to make clear his meaning by specific examples, "can understand Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*, Prévost's *Manon Lescaut*, or *L'imitation de Jésus Christ*, without a knowledge of the lives of their authors and of the century in which they came to be; still less can one really appreciate the truly great—Homer, Shakespeare, Dante—without such knowledge."

The purpose of this scientific naturalistic criticism is to establish a firm basis for judgment. It must be supplemented by the operations of faculties whose processes are not entirely amenable to the investigations of science—the intuitive critical faculty, and taste. This side of his theory will constitute a section on Sainte-Beuve as aesthetic critic.

¹ *Ibid.*, IX, 81.

IV. AESTHETIC CRITICISM

More than once in the foregoing section it was necessary to call attention to the fact that, after even the most sweeping and enthusiastic claim for the results of naturalistic criticism, Sainte-Beuve makes an exception, a reservation, an almost nullifying claim as to the service of taste and of the native, instinctive critical faculty. In most of these cases, however, he is urging the service of this extra or super-scientific faculty, not as a substitute for the scientific process, but as a supplement to it. The value of *constatation* and *la critique purement physiologique* is great, but

cela dit, et nonobstant ces suppléments d'enquête toujours ouverts, conservons, s'il se peut, la légèreté du goût, son impression délicate et prompte; en présence des œuvres vives de l'esprit, osons avoir notre jugement net et vif aussi, et bien tranché, bien dégagé, sûr de ce qu'il est, même sans pièces à l'appui.¹

And again:

Maintenons, messieurs, les degrés de l'art, les étages de l'esprit; encourageons toute recherche laborieuse, mais laissons en tout la maîtrise au talent, à la méditation, au jugement, à la raison, au goût.²

And again in the same essay, *De la tradition en littérature*:

De cette disposition bien avouée et convenue entre nous, de ce que, tout en profitant de notre mieux des instruments, un peu onéreux parfois, de la critique nouvelle, nous retiendrons quelques-unes des habitudes et les principes mêmes de l'ancienne critique, accordant la première place dans notre admiration et notre estime à l'invention, à la composition, à l'art d'écrire, et *sensibles*, avant tout, aux charme de l'esprit, à l'élévation ou à la finesse du talent, etc.³

In this passage the word *sensibles* acknowledges and sums up the recognition of the existence and importance of a distinct critical faculty, which we must call upon to enable us to make a judgment, to tell finally when other processes may fail us, that a work is good or bad.

Sainte-Beuve's humanistic instinct and training never deserted him, and he maintained that whatever work of art he had before him, though

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, XV, 377. This *même sans pièces à l'appui* would seem to be a contradiction of the often-expressed demand that the scholar and the scientist must precede the critic so as to enable him to base his judgments on facts.

² *Ibid.*, XV, 376.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 378.

he might up to a certain point handle it as a scientific specimen, was to be judged on its merits as art *sub specie aeternitatis* as well as *sub specie temporis*. It is when he neglects this step of adjudication in criticizing, or refrains from taking it because of absorption in other matters, that he is weak.

The weak point in Sainte-Beuve's armor is his occasional tendency to rest in his analysis. It is finer art to suggest the conclusion rather than to draw it, no doubt, but one should at least do that; he occasionally fails to justify his analysis in this way; so that his result is both artistically and philosophically inconclusive. Now and then he pays in this way for his aversion to pedantry and system, and the excessive disinterestedness of his curiosity.¹

Sainte-Beuve was too keen a thinker not to realize that purely investigative and analytic criticism is rather a tool than an end in itself—a tool with which great things may be wrought but which must help to build a greater conception, an ideal, a standard. It is valuable as a contributing element in the search for the truth and as furnishing a basis for the measuring and appraising of works of art; but it is only one, and often a minor, element. After we have found out the facts, have explained the work of art as a product of its author and its age, there still persists the question which in its baldest form asks, "Is it good, is it bad?" and not infrequently even, "How good is it, how bad is it?" Sainte-Beuve rarely shirked these questions and seldom ignored them, and, as has been pointed out, it is in his weaker work, where he limits himself to analysis, that we do not find answers to one or both of them. This means that Sainte-Beuve added to the scientific and historic critic in him a greater critic who was aesthetic and even judicial. It has often been said that Sainte-Beuve was not a judicial critic—that he did not pass judgment on the works of art he treated.² This view may be accounted for on the ground that those who hold it place their emphasis on Sainte-Beuve's accumulation of facts which, however vast and important, with him is usually a preliminary to judging. But before we can discuss this matter profitably it seems necessary to say one more word as to what constitutes a judicial critic and a critical judgment.

¹ Brownell, *Criticism*, p. 68.

² Critics who think that Sainte-Beuve did not pass judgment are numerous. Here are some examples: Levallois, *op. cit.*, p. 112. Harper, *Sainte-Beuve*, p. 326, quotes Barbey d'Aurevilly to this effect; see also, Scherer, Faguet, Léon Séché, d'Haussonville, who all lay the greater emphasis on his impressionistic side.

The description of a judicial critic as one who merely metes out praise or blame—who bestows laudation if he happens to approve, condemnation if he happens to dislike—is a rather shallow handling of the matter.¹ To identify the critical judge on the one hand with the critical executioner who, after the manner of the old Scotch reviewers, dismisses his victim with a contemptuous “This will never do, Mr. Wordsworth” or “Back to your gallipots, John Keats,” or, on the other hand, with the indiscriminate singer of paeans of praise, the merely appreciative impressionistic log-roller, is in either case both unfair and unjust. Sainte-Beuve has several warnings against undue laudation: “Vous n’en concluez pas, que nous serons nécessairement, à l’égard des livres et des écrivains célèbres, dans la louange monotone, dans une louange universelle.”² Is not, then, the judicial critic the one who, avoiding mere laudation and condemnation, offers a definitive appraisement, a final word as to the qualities and defects of the work of art; who sets up a comparison of this given product with some standard based not only on an expert personal taste but on tradition and on some of the laws of taste which he believes to be tested and fundamental; who does not leave his discussion inconclusive, but who either expressly or by unmistakable implication “places” his man and his book in relation to the standard?

With this idea of the judicial critic and of the process of judging Sainte-Beuve’s practice will be found to agree. The first passage of any importance in this connection, the introduction to the *Causeries du lundi*, has already been quoted.³ Speaking of his second period, that of appreciative criticism, he writes, it will be remembered, “cette critique pourtant comme telle avait un défaut—elle ne concluait pas.”⁴ The completed function, then, of the perfect criticism is to offer a conclusion. And Sainte-Beuve himself is conscious of having sought to remedy his deficiency when he writes: “En critique, j’ai assez fait l’avocat, faisons maintenant le juge.”⁵ He also accounts for the fact that he is much hated on the ground of his *indépendance de jugement*⁶ which leads him to speak his mind. He feels that it is the critic’s duty to express his opinions and, if need be, *trancher*.⁷ The true rôle of the critic now, as always, is to judge. “Le propre des critiques en général, comme l’indique assez leur nom, est de juger, et au besoin de trancher, de

¹ Cf. J. M. Robertson, *Essays toward a Critical Method*, p. 46.

² *Causeries du lundi*, XV, 379.

⁵ *Portraits littéraires*, III, 550.

³ *Supra*, p. 2.

⁶ *Causeries du lundi*, XII, 44.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 3.

⁷ *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 14.

décider"—all the great critics have done this. "Tous ces hommes jugaient des choses de goût avec vivacité; avec trop d'exclusion peut-être, mais enfin avec un sentiment net, décisif et irrésistible."¹ The most important item of this quotation is, of course, the very first "le propre des critiques est de juger," and one can imagine no more definite statement of Sainte-Beuve's belief as to this function of his calling. The quarrel between impressionistic and judicial criticism has taken definite form since Sainte-Beuve's day, but he was aware of the distinctions between the two practices, as witness this passage:

Aujourd'hui il n'est pas rare de trouver, dans ceux qui s'intitulent critiques, du savoir, de la plume, de l'érudition, de la fantaisie. Donnez-leur un ouvrage nouveau, ils vont discourir à merveille sur le sujet, ou à côté du sujet. ... Ils vous diront tout, excepté un jugement. Ils ont tout du critique, excepté le judicieux. Ils n'oseront se compromettre jusqu'à dire: "Ceci est bon, ceci est mauvais."²

This might be a summary of the faults of the critical school of Anatole France or of Lemaître. It is on the ground of his failure to utter a word of final appraisal and his consequent evasion of the essential duty of the critic that Sainte-Beuve pronounces Pontmartin not a critic at all but merely *un aimable causeur*.³

The ability to judge comes of a critical faculty, an innate gift, a talent which by a sort of divination arrives at a valid judgment. Such was the equipment of the great critics of former days, who, though lacking the knowledge that has broadened the basis of our judgments, nevertheless delivered verdicts sound and correct—and still sound and correct. The humanist in Sainte-Beuve forced him to recognize that the judgments of former days *were* sound and made him look with suspicion on any radical reversal of tradition. Tradition is, after all, only the accumulated experience of the race. "Faire dans nos jugements des réformes continuelles, si besoin est, mais des réformes seulement et non des révolutions; voilà le plus sûr résultat de la critique littéraire, telle que je l'entends."⁴

From a practical point of view the critic's right to give utterance to his judgments is limited. We must not praise too much for fear of exaggeration: "Nous tâcherons donc, de ne pas admirer plus qu'il ne faut, ni autrement qu'il ne faut; de ne pas tout donner à un siècle, même à un grand siècle."⁵ On the other hand, out of consideration for other

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 112.

² *Ibid.*, I, 382.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 16.

⁴ *Ibid.*, VIII, 391.

⁵ *Causeries du lundi*, XV, 379.

artists (Sainte-Beuve was not always so tactful as he would have us believe), we must keep to ourselves our most adverse opinions and our most severe condemnations. He distinguishes on this merely practical basis three kinds of judgments:

Un critique, en restant ce qu'il doit être, peut donc avoir jusqu'à ... trois expressions de jugements: le jugement secret, intime, causé dans la chambre et entre amis, un jugement d'accord avec le type de talent qu'on porte en soi et, par conséquent, comme tout ce qui est personnel, vif, passionné, prime-sautier, enthousiaste ou répulsif, un jugement qui, en bien des cas, emporte la pièce; c'est celui de la *prédilection* ou de l'*antipathie*.

But, out of respect for others, we cannot express these judgments indiscriminately or scatter them broadcast:

Il faut, si l'on veut rester juste, introduire à chaque instant dans son esprit un certain contraire. Cela constitue le second jugement, réfléchi et pondéré en vue du public: c'est celui de l'*équité* et de l'*intelligence*. Enfin il y a un troisième jugement, souvent commandé et dicté, au moins dans la forme, par les circonstances, les convenances extérieures; un jugement modifié, mitigé par des raisons valables, des égards et des considérations dignes de respect; c'est ce que j'appelle le jugement de *position* ou d'*indulgence*.¹

The last two kinds of judgments are those which a critic may print with safety; and most of the expressions of opinion we find in Sainte-Beuve could be classified under the last two heads. However, in two or three places he gave free rein to his pen and left us those bodies of trenchant verdicts on contemporary and classical authors, the hundred or so pages of *Pensées* at the end of Volume XI of the *Causeries du lundi*, and the posthumous *Cahiers*. In these were gathered the poison drops of bitter sarcasm and withering condemnation that he had not dared print. In general, however, in accord with his own expressed doctrine, his verdicts were generous and expressed with moderation.²

Quite frequently Sainte-Beuve's conclusions assumed a form in which the meaning, though quite inescapable, is not explicitly expressed—no doubt the more artistic practice as a matter of style. Sainte-Beuve, however, risked no mistakes. Before leaving matters to the reader he generally led him to the point where the conclusion was inevitable. He says that certain persons have found fault with him for not condemning the morality of the eighteenth century:

Je leur ferai remarquer que je réussis bien mieux si je les provoque à la condamner eux-mêmes, que si je prenais les devants et paraissais vouloir

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, VI, 300.

² "Gardons nous de l'ironie en jugeant; de toutes les dispositions de l'esprit l'ironie est la moins intelligente" (*Cahiers*, p. 75).

leur imposer un jugement en toute rencontre, ce qui, à la longue, fatigue et choque toujours chez un critique. Le lecteur aime assez à se croire plus sévère que le critique; je lui laisse ce plaisir-là.¹

Perhaps this is sufficient to make clear the fact that Sainte-Beuve believed that the critical process should eventuate in a judgment or a series of judgments expressed or unmistakably implied. It is also clear that to him the trustworthy judicial critic is one who bases his judgments not on merely personal likes and dislikes but rather on aesthetic grounds and on some basic principles of art. Sainte-Beuve taught that there were such universal principles which all critics were bound to recognize; that there was a fundamental ground from which artists shifted but slightly, and that remaining on this fundamental ground was entirely compatible with individual variation:

J'ai souvent remarqué que, quand deux bons esprits portent un jugement tout à fait différent sur le même auteur, il y a fort à parier que c'est qu'ils ne pensent pas en effet, pour le moment, au même objet, ... que c'est qu'ils ne l'ont pas tout entier présent, qu'ils ne le *comprennent* pas actuellement tout entier. Une attention et une connaissance plus étendues rapprocheraient les jugements dissidents et les remettraient d'accord. Mais aussi il y a, même dans le cercle régulier et gradué des admirations légitimes, une certaine latitude à laisser à la diversité des goûts, des esprits et des âges.²

Critical judgments differ, then, only because critics are not looking at the same thing in an author, are not regarding him under the same aspects; if they did (by implication) their estimates of him would be the same, and all would agree as to excellence or defect. This looks like a clear recognition of some absolute critical criterion, one which is the same to all men, when all men see the facts clearly. These things are the essentials, Sainte-Beuve goes on to say, and the matters of individual taste are relegated to the less important, to the outer fringe of art.

Judgments and estimates may be absolute, therefore, because they are founded on something universal. Judgments of personal taste are useful only in a very limited field.

Oh! Que je hais, en fait d'art, ces jugements soi-disant sensés, qui, ne se laissant pour rien déloger de leur cadres, ne savent ni remonter d'une idée au dessus des choses de leur berceau, ni se transporter dans la postérité d'une journée par delà l'instant de la tombe. Ils représentent le préjugé vivant dans toute sa rectitude et son aplomb.³

That is to say, the critic who cannot transcend his time and look to the eternal principles at art is exhibiting mere prejudice.

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, II, 267.

² *Ibid.*, XV, 381.

³ *Cahiers*, p. 37.

Sainte-Beuve repeats several times that criticism, *la science morale*, has its laws:

Il semble qu'en littérature et en morale les choses ne se passent point comme dans la science proprement dite et que ce soit toujours à recommencer; je pense toutefois qu'il y a, dans cet ordre d'observations aussi, de certaines conclusions acquises et démontrées sur lesquelles il n'y a pas lieu pour les bons esprits à revenir. La science morale, bien comprise, bien appliquée aux individus, a, comme toutes les sciences, ses jugements définitifs et ses résultats.¹

But even clearer recognition of abiding principles for judging are made by him in his comment that the time has now come to do justice to Béranger: "de lui payer, dis-je, une large part, mais une part mesurée au même poids et dans la même balance dont nous nous servons pour d'autres."² These "même poids et la même balance dont nous nous servons pour d'autres," are they not Sainte-Beuve's literary criteria, the standards which shall apply to all artists? But while he saw the necessity for great and broad principles of criticism, with characteristic broad-mindedness he made room as he always did for *un certain contraire*. He warns us solemnly against systematizing, against strict adherence to rules; the world is in constant flux, he says:

Oh! je la sais, dans le tourbillon accéléré qui entraîne le monde et les sociétés modernes, tout change, tout s'agrandit et se modifie incessamment. Des formes nouvelles de talents se produisent chaque jour; *toutes les règles, d'après lesquelles on s'était accoutumé à juger les choses mêmes de l'esprit, sont déjouées*; l'étonnement est devenu une habitude; nous marchons de monstres en monstres. Le vrai d'hier, déjà incomplet ce matin, sera demain tout à fait dépassé et laissé derrière. Les moules, fixés à peine, deviennent aussitôt trop étroits et insuffisants. Aussi, ... chacun à chaque instant devrait être occupé à briser dans son esprit le moule qui est près de prendre et de se former. Ne nous figeons pas; tenons nos esprits vivants et fluides.³

In this characteristic passage he thus warns us against setting up petty standards, and the stiff and narrow application of any standard; but he is certainly not advising the abrogation of all criteria.

There are five *pierres de touche* whereby the critic tests the quality of the work of art, five weights in the judicial scales in which he appraises values: first and foremost, taste; second, reality, truth to life; third, tradition—these chief; we add a fourth, logic and consistency, and a fifth, morality, which played a real though minor part in Sainte-Beuve's procedure.

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 2.

² *Causeries du lundi*, II, 286.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, VII, 49.

The first and it may be said the most important weight in the scales of judgment is taste. We have seen already that Sainte-Beuve regarded the criticism of mere unaided taste as out of date, but also that he insisted on taste as an essential quality in the critic, and a necessary factor in criticism. He saw clearly that to say "I do not like it" is not passing a judgment or giving a real decision on the ultimate value of any work, being as it is a statement of one's own mere opinion, and very probably a revelation of one's own limitations. Shakespeare remains great whether Voltaire liked him or not, and it is not Shakespeare's demerit that the illustrious French critic was not able to see his greatness.

Taste, however, is the primary arbiter, the *sentinelle toujours en éveille*,¹ the guidepost which points the way for the critic and tells him when he is in the right path. It is the complement of the indispensable *bon sens*; it transcends reason, for, since it is instinctive, it functions where reason does not and cannot function.² *Le goût* is not a capricious gift of fortune, knowing no laws, a matter of whim; on the contrary it has its own rules, its own body of accumulated precedents, for it abides from age to age. "Je crois toujours à la permanence d'une certaine délicatesse, une fois acquise, dans l'âme humaine, dans l'esprit des hommes ou des femmes"³—this *délicatesse* is a synonym of good taste. *Le bon goût* can be cultivated and refined in persons and in social groups; it is not entirely lost even in the grossest epochs.

What, then, is this "taste" which is so important in criticism? "Rien n'est plus rare que le bon goût, à le prendre en son sens exquis ... l'amour du simple, du sensé, de l'élevé, de ce qui est grand sans phrase."⁴ One must keep correcting one's self in writing "par un sens vif, délicat, mobile, qui à chaque instant remet tout en question; et ce sens exquis s'appelle le goût."⁵ Mme de Girardin, he says, defines *goût* as *la pudeur de l'esprit*, and this he calls a good definition.⁶ Montaigne was lacking in good taste, "si l'on entend par goût le choix net et parfait, le dégagement des éléments du beau."⁷

Taste in Sainte-Beuve's mind is a sort of sixth sense and partakes of the nature of the other senses in that it is unreasoning and sure and at times epicurean:

L'Abbé Gélyoy n'a très-bien remarqué; "le goût, à proprement parler, emporte l'idée de je ne sais quelle matérialité." Il y entre une part de sens.

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, XV, 373.

² *Ibid.*, V, 69.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, VIII, 85.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 283.

⁵ *Cahiers*, p. 56.

⁶ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 391.

⁷ *Ibid.*, IV, 80.

Le mot *judicium* des Latins a une acception plus étendue et un peu plus abstraite que notre mot *goût* ... les gens d'esprit qui, à table, mangent au hasard, ... peuvent être de grands raisonneurs et de hautes intelligences, mais ils ne sont pas des *gens de goût*.¹

Because taste is a sense and consequently savors of the flesh, De Laprade makes an assault on the *homme de goût*, who, he says, "est celui qui n'a jamais rien admiré." But Sainte-Beuve comes to the defense:

Il en veut au *goût* de ce que son nom est emprunté au moins noble de tous les sens. ... Il ne sent pas que c'est, au contraire, en vertu d'une analogie exquise que ce mot de *goût* a prévalu chez nous sur celui de *jugement*. Le jugement! Je sais des esprits qui l'ont très bon et qui, en même temps manquent de goût, parceque le goût exprime ce qu'il y a de plus fin et de plus instinctif dans le plus confusément délicat des organes.²

Taste is essentially a selective faculty, a distinguishing instrument, but, like the other senses, may become fatigued and refuse to function. "Le vrai goût discerne, examine; il a ses temps de repos, et il choisit."³ "Il faut choisir, et la première condition du goût, après avoir tout compris, est de ne pas voyager sans cesse, mais de s'asseoir une fois et de se fixer. Rien ne blase et n'éteint plus le goût que les voyages sans fin; l'esprit poétique n'est pas le *Juif Errant*."⁴ The basis of taste is stable, abiding throughout the ages, and, though taste does undergo certain minor changes, sometimes growing more refined, sometimes seeming to deteriorate, it never departs very widely from its stable basis; it changes so slowly from moment to moment in the individual and from generation to generation in the race that there is no shock of change.

In consequence taste is identified in some measure with the classical spirit and tradition; it is a humanistic ideal and is bound up with the conception of the perfect man. We must attain "à la vraie mesure humaine; sans laquelle il n'est pas de grand goût, de goût véritable."⁵

¹ *Portraits littéraires*, III, 548.

² *Nouveaux lundis*, I, 12. This same idea is found again here: "Vous avez beau dire, je ne croirai jamais qu'un homme aussi malpropre ait été un homme de goût" (Planche); "le goût, après tout, n'est que le plus subtil des sens" (*Correspondance*, I, 320).

³ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 215.

⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 53.

⁵ *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 27. This phrase *le grand goût* is generally used of the age of Louis XIV. Sainte-Beuve must have had this in mind when he wrote the passage.

In one place he identifies *urbanité* and *goût*,¹ and *urbanité*, as we shall see later, is to Saint-Beuve the main characteristic of the classical age.

The sixteenth century saw the rise of this doctrine of taste,² but in the seventeenth there occurred for the only time in the history of France the union of *bon sens* and *bon goût*, which to Sainte-Beuve seemed the ultimate literary achievement.³ In the eighteenth century taste was on the ebb; it was not so exquisitely educated, nor so widely disseminated as it had been, though in essence it remained the same. But in Sainte-Beuve's own day he says, in one of the few hopeful passages about modern literature, that taste was returning to its ancient authority and was again being trained to excellence, largely under the lead of Chateaubriand. That author

revenait et nous ramenait par des hauteurs un peu escarpées et imprévues à la grande et forte langue, et c'était sur ses traces que le goût lui-même devait retrouver bientôt sa vigueur et son originalité. Ce goût réfléchi et acquis, mais réel, est une des conquêtes de la critique depuis M. Walckenaer.⁴

Taste was, then, to Sainte-Beuve another sense, a perception of unity, of simplicity, of dignity; unreasoning and spontaneous but eminently educable, a touchstone for the simple, the refined, the unexaggerated. It is to him both a native, instinctive sensibility, and a habit cultivated by experience and tradition. "It is inborn, as spontaneous as insight, indeed with an insight of its own."⁵ Taste was, we may say then, the keystone of Sainte-Beuve's critical judicial arch.

The second of Sainte-Beuve's critical divining-rods was *réalité*, or, to sum it up as fairly as possible in one phrase, *truth to life*.⁶ He does not mean the reality posited in the creed of professed realism, not actuality as the record of observed facts; he would set his reality over against sentimental idealism on the one hand, and cynical disillusionment on the other. He would ask, when he has for study a drama, a novel, "Do people conduct their lives like this; are these the motives on which men act, and is this the response that would be called out by this combination of circumstances and motives, has the author made

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 69.

² *Ibid.*, IV, 80.

³ *Ibid.*, III, 256. "Le plein bon sens et le vrai bon goût, chez nous, n'ont jamais existé ensemble qu'à un très-court moment de la littérature et de la langue."

⁴ *Ibid.*, VI, 173. "Depuis M. Walckenaer," after 1830. He is, of course, speaking here only of the revival of taste in the nineteenth century.

⁵ Stedman, *Nature of Poetry*, p. 72.

⁶ For his demand for the study of truth by the critic see *Causeries du lundi*, X, 47.

on us the impression that this is life as men and women live it and feel it; though we must grant that these events did not take place in the actual world, may we yet assume that they would seem natural or credible if they did?" Since Sainte-Beuve's time this reality has at times seemed to be regarded by some critics as the one and sufficient tenet.¹ But none of them could be more convincing, and few of them would be so eloquent, as Sainte-Beuve in the following passage:

Réalité, tu es le fond de la vie, et comme telle, même dans tes aspérités, même dans tes rudesses, tu attaches les esprits sérieux, et tu as pour eux un charme. Et pourtant, à la longue et toute seule, tu finirais par rebuter insensiblement, par rassasier; tu es trop souvent plate, vulgaire et lassante. C'est bien assez de te rencontrer à chaque pas dans la vie; on veut du moins dans l'art, en te retrouvant et en te sentant présente ou voisine toujours, avoir affaire encore à autre chose que toi. Oui, tu as besoin, à tout instant, ... d'être relevée par quelque endroit, sous peine d'accabler et peut-être d'ennuyer comme trop ordinaire. Il te faut, pour le moins, posséder et joindre à tes mérites ce génie d'imitation si parfait, si animé, si fin, qu'il devient comme une création et une magie à son tour, cet emploi merveilleux des moyens et des procédés de l'art qui, sans s'étaler et sans faire montre, respire ou brille dans chaque détail comme dans l'ensemble. Il te faut le *style*, en un mot. Il te faut encore, s'il se peut, le *sentiment*, un coin de sympathie, un rayon moral qui te traverse et qui te vienne éclairer; ... autrement, bientôt tu nous laisses froids, indifférents, ... nous nous ennuyons de ne point trouver en toi notre part et notre place. Il te faut encore, et c'est là le plus beau triomphe, il te faut, tout en étant observée et respectée, je ne sais quoi qui t'accomplisse et qui t'achève, qui te rectifie sans te fausser, qui t'élève sans te faire perdre terre, qui te donne tout l'esprit que tu peux avoir sans cesser un moment de paraître naturelle, qui te laisse reconnaissable à tous, mais plus lumineuse que dans l'ordinaire de la vie, plus adorable et plus belle ... ce qu'on appelle *l'idéal* enfin.

Que si tout cela te manque et que tu te bornes strictement à ce que tu es, sans presque nul choix et selon le hasard de la rencontre, si tu te tiens à tes pauvretés ... et à tes rugosités de toutes sortes, eh bien! *je t'accepterai encore*, et s'il fallait opter, je te préférerais même ainsi, pauvre et médiocre, mais prise sur le fait, mais sincère, à toutes les chimères brillantes, aux fantaisies, aux imaginations les plus folles ou les plus fines ... parcequ'il y a en toi la source, le fond humain et naturel duquel tout jaillit à son heure, et un attrait de vérité, parfois un inattendu touchant, que rien ne vaut et ne rechète.²

¹ Brownell, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

² *Nouveaux lundis*, IV, 137. This passage occurs in his consideration of Champfleury's *Violon de Faïence*. Art must have the ideal to redeem the true. Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* "en réduisant l'art à n'être que la seule et simple vérité [elle] me paraît hors de cette vérité" (*Correspondance*, II, 314).

This remarkable passage, reproduced at this length because of its importance, might well be taken as Sainte-Beuve's literary credo—reality treated with sentiment and art. This demand for truth to life here in connection with realism is a classical and humanistic doctrine, and Sainte-Beuve is only saying in another way: "Rien n'est beau que le vrai, le vrai seul est aimable." In this respect the classicists and the realists join hands indeed, are united to so great an extent that one is justified in distinguishing not three types of literature—classical, romantic, and realistic—but two, humanistic and romantic; for the genuine realists and the true classicists are one in their demand for that truth to life which the romanticists are inclined to disregard or more actively to repudiate.

Sainte-Beuve makes an adequate synthesis of the best thinking concerning realism in art when he distinguishes between reality as truth to life and reality as mere fact. While reality he feels is eminently both the field and the product of art, mere fact demands artistic treatment if it is to produce artistic results. Where purely scientific and factual truth begins, literature ends—or perhaps the converse of this statement is more just, literature begins where scientific fact ends. "Gardez-vous de l'histoire. ... Evitons dans l'art sérieux de rendre trop sensible la divorce entre la poésie et la vérité,"¹ meaning here by *vérité* this factual aspect of truth. True he is speaking here only of poetry, but in the passage quoted above he makes the same demand for all literature.

Art must transcend and purify its subject-matter, the ultimate truth, but when it fails to keep to the basis of reality in this higher sense it repudiates its essential function. Again and again Sainte-Beuve condemns a work or a character, "ce n'est pas vrai," and means that it is not true to life.²

The third of the critical criteria that make up Sainte-Beuve's testing equipment is tradition. He means by this the corpus of ideas and

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, V, 306. On the other hand: "Vous aimez, monsieur, dans la poésie la réalité et le sentiment: je suis de cette même école" (*Correspondance*, I, 170). Let us recognize once for all that Sainte-Beuve did not and could not make the distinction between *reality* and *verity* which has grown up in critical thinking since his time.

² It is interesting to note that Sainte-Beuve often decides truth to life on a basis of tradition. It is of course obvious that in the demand for truth to life one has to ask "truth to whose life?" Sainte-Beuve claims that there are laws of this as well as of the other aspects of literature. He says: "Le roman n'est pas entièrement d'accord avec la vérité humaine, avec l'entière vérité telle que les grands peintres de la passion l'ont de tout temps conçue" (*Nouveaux lundis*, VII, 146).

customs which has drawn together throughout the ages, concerning the content and the form of art. In trying to reconstitute Sainte-Beuve's idea of it we must examine his opinion on the French tradition—the various elements that go to make it up, and the schools that have contributed to it. There is, Sainte-Beuve believes, a prevailing tradition in French literature, the classical, and so far from being a shallow assumption or a pose it is something deeply ingrained in French national character and taste:

Il y a une tradition: qui le nierait? Elle existe pour nous toute tracée, elle est visible, comme une de ces avenues et de ces voies immenses, grandioses, qui traversaient autrefois l'Empire, et qui aboutissaient à la Ville par excellence. Descendants des Romains, ... nous avons à embrasser, à comprendre, à ne jamais désertier l'héritage de ces maîtres et de ces pères illustres, héritage ... qui forme le plus clair et le plus solide de notre fonds intellectuel. Cette tradition ... consiste en un certain principe de raison et de culture qui a pénétré à la longue, pour le modifier, dans le caractère même de cette nation gauloise, et qui est entré dès longtemps jusque dans la trempe des esprits. C'est là tout ce qu'il importe de ne pas laisser perdre, ce qu'il faut ne point souffrir qu'on altère ... sans avertir du moins et sans s'alarmer comme dans un péril commun.¹

It is this classical tradition, the legacy from the Greeks and Latins, which we must strive to preserve. There has never been a great writer, says Sainte-Beuve, outside this tradition; they all knew and embodied its essential ideas. Not even Shakespeare, he claims, was without it.² Sainte-Beuve himself was distinctly and consciously in the line:

He possessed a delicate taste for beautiful work and a strong respect for the traditions which have fostered it. Here is the universal and abiding element of his talent. He has a sense for the classical, balancing and employing his restless instinct for individuality. In this respect it may be said that two schools of art and indeed two centuries so widely separated as the seventeenth and nineteenth find in him their representative. He entertained for the long tried opinion and generally approved judgments of competent predecessors, an almost reverent respect ... He was practical enough also to perceive the advantage of classicism as consecrating a stable body of accepted opinions. He appreciated the simplicity and the general sufficiency of these standards in the case of French literature. In spite of his skeptical habit, in spite of his distrust of theory and doctrine, he too, like Bossuet, whom he deeply respected, was ever seeking eternal law under the discordant contradictions of human history.³

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, XV, 357.

² *Ibid.*, p. 366.

³ Harper, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

As he grew older this approval of the classical became more pronounced and more outspoken. "He sided more and more with the Olympians against the Titans."¹ He increasingly identified things normal, sane, healthy, with the classical, things unsound and abnormal with the romantic.² He carefully defined "the classic" in his article "De la tradition en littérature" in Volume XV of the *Lundis*:

Le classique, en effet, dans son caractère le plus général et dans sa plus large définition, comprend les littératures à l'état de santé et de fleur heureuse, les littératures en plein accord et en harmonie avec leur époque, avec leur cadre social, avec les principes et les pouvoirs dirigeants de la société ... les littératures qui sont et qui se sentent chez elles, dans leur voie, non déclassées, non troublantes.³

Elsewhere he quotes Goethe to the same effect. "J'appelle le classique *le sain*, et le romantique *le malade*." A classic is a writer in accord with his time; a romantic, one who is not.⁴ To Sainte-Beuve, however, the supreme beauty, indeed the only real beauty, is to be found within that classical tradition which once or twice in the history of the world has come to full flower:

Quand je parle de *beauté*, je m'entends, et je m'adresse à ceux qui savent de quoi il s'agit, lorsqu'ils prononcent ce mot. Il peut y avoir dans un ouvrage de l'habileté ... sans qu'il y'ait véritablement beauté. ... Relisez un chant d'Homère, une scène de Sophocle, un chœur d'Euripide, un livre de Virgile! grandeur ou flamme du sentiment, éclat de l'expression, et s'il se peut, harmonie de composition et d'ensemble, ... ce sont là quelques—uns des traits et des conditions de cette beauté plus aisée à sentir qu'à définir. ... Elle n'a brillé dans ses parfaits exemplaires, cette incomparable beauté, qu'une seule fois ou peut-être deux fois sous le soleil.⁵

And again he writes "le beau semble appartenir plus exclusivement à l'antiquité."⁶

In the article "De la tradition en littérature" he traces the course of this, to him, paramount tradition through the ages. Hellenic art

¹ Babbitt, *Masters of Modern French Criticism*, p. 137.

² *Ibid.*, XV, 369. To be sure he always admired romantic feeling and treatment, provided they were noble, as his admiration for Shakespeare and his love for Musset show, and he did say of the Romantic movement as late as 1851, it is one "que j'aime, dont je m'honore d'être, moi indigne, dont les amis, toutes les admirations de ma jeunesse, ont été, dont tous ceux qui survivent sont encore" (*Nouveaux lundis*, III, 97).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 369. ⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 46. ⁵ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 377.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 409. He repeats the same thought in the article "Qu'est ce qu'un classique" in *Causeries du lundi*, III.

was and still is supreme—the source and fountainhead of all subsequent artistic inspiration. One may well question, he says, whether or not all the productions of all the other literatures are worth a single masterpiece of Greek art. From Greece he traces the stream to Rome where it created Latin literature. All great writers in the occidental world have been of this tradition, have derived their inspiration from antiquity, and have been dominated by this *souffle hellénique*. To this prevailing line of tradition coming down from Greece, the Middle Ages added one powerful element when, to the tradition of Atticism and urbanity, they added “le sentiment délicat de l’amour et de la courtoisie chevaleresque” and the chivalric service of the lady as an ideal;¹ that and Christian antiquity “littérairement imparfaite, moralement supérieure” are the only accretions of the modern world to the ancient tradition.

What is true of literary inspiration in general is true in particular of the spirit that moves in literary criticism—that it derives from this unbroken classical tradition: “En critique comme en morale, les anciens ont trouvé toutes les grandes lois; les modernes n’ont fait le plus souvent que raffiner spirituellement sur les détails.”² The one time in history since the mighty Hellenic days, when it came to full flower, is the age of Louis XIV, the *grand siècle*, the triumphant moment of French literature. As a classicist and a humanist Sainte-Beuve felt that in this moment French letters reached the apogee. To be real critics we must have knowledge of classical art both at its fountainhead and as it has expressed itself in this French thought and art.³ Literature then was classical, in both the senses in which he used the word, since it both produced the greatest literary masters of the nation and at the same time followed most closely the artistic spirit of the ancients.⁴ The work of this

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, XV, 360 ff.

² *Ibid.*, I, 13.

³ Sainte-Beuve lays some stress on the need of classical training for a literary man. We shall have to study antiquity from our earliest youth and make it ours when our minds are impressionable (*Nouveaux lundis*, VII, 47). What a privation it is not to know Greek! “Avoue,” says Pindar, “que c’est la plus grande amertume pour l’homme de connaître les belles choses et de s’en voir le pied dehors par nécessité.” “Appliquez cela,” comments Sainte-Beuve, “à la littérature grecque, à ceux qui le savent et en sont privés” (*Cahiers*, p. 152).

⁴ It is necessary to keep in mind the distinction between the two senses of the term “classical” in Sainte-Beuve, the difference between a “classical writer” and a “classic.” The former is a writer in the tradition of the ancients; the latter Sainte-Beuve defines thus: “Un vrai classique—c’est un auteur qui a enrichi l’esprit humain, qui en a réellement augmenté le trésor, qui lui a fait faire un pas de plus, qui a découvert

consummate age was Sainte-Beuve's perpetual standard for comparison:

He never questioned the personal authority of Bossuet, nor the beauty and propriety of Racine's matured style, nor the sanity of Mme de Sévigné. With the utmost distinctness he conceived of seventeenth-century literature as an entity, an organism, a thing complete in itself. Its excellence was to him self-evident. He could never have been brought to share Renan's opinion that it was empty and unedifying. It gave him a standard. To this test he brought the sixteenth century the eighteenth; and ultimately the nineteenth.¹

In matters of style as in those of philosophy and ideas he finds his model and standard in this seventeenth century. He often wished for a return of that moderate and pellucid yet colorful writing, the secret of which the merest *dames de cour* of the great age seemed to have at their pen points. We have quoted in another connection the passage of magnificent eloquence in which he voices his enthusiasm for the "noble and mighty harmony of the grand siècle,"² and many other passages in which he speaks with admiration equally sincere, if less eloquent, could be added. Indeed one finally comes to feel that on this point Sainte-Beuve displays something less than his characteristic balance of mind and complete catholic receptivity. It assumes the proportions of a "fixed idea," a state of mind quite unexpected in him who in other things invariably provided room for *un certain contraire*.

In spite of his enthusiasm—rather because of it—Sainte-Beuve judged very severely the classical school of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, recognizing it as the merest neo-classicism, not a reincarnation of the Hellenic or the Roman spirit, but a dead imitation of the ancient forms. To the pseudo-classical school of the eighteenth century he had a positive aversion; he had no words of condemnation too strong for writers like Jean Baptiste Rousseau and Louis Racine,

quelque vérité morale non équivoque, ou ressaisi quelque passion éternelle dans le cœur où tout semblait connu et exploré; qui a rendu sa pensée, son observation ou son invention, sous une forme n'importe laquelle, mais large et grande, fine et sensée, saine et belle en soi; qui a parlé à tous dans un style à lui et qui se trouve aussi celui de tout le monde, dans un style nouveau sans néologisme, nouveau et antique, aisément contemporain de tous les âges" (*Causeries du lundi*, III, 42). In this sense a romanticist may be a "classic."

¹ Harper, *op. cit.*, p. 324. It seems, however, that he became at times dissatisfied even with this ideal. "Je ne sais si beaucoup de gens sont comme moi, mais j'avoue que par moments je commence à en avoir assez de la littérature du XVII^{me} siècle" (*Nouveaux lundis*, V, 371; cf. also p. 257).

² Cf. *supra*, p. 18.

whose work he regarded as but a servile and empty imitation of the forms of the great age:

Que d'imitation des Grecs aux Latins, de ceux-ci aux Italiens, aux modernes. Le même fonds poétique a été exploité à satiété et remanié. La forme seule s'est renouvelée un peu à la surface. L'invention est souvent aussi mince que la feuille d'or ou d'argent qui recouvre le cuivre.¹

It is, then, the spirit of the classical tradition—its sanity, moderation, dignity, beauty—that the artist must try to appropriate and to re-embody; he does nothing if he makes a formal copy of some great predecessor. "L'artiste doit être de son temps," and when he imitates he ceases to be "de son temps."²

One of Sainte-Beuve's essential doctrines was that of the continuous progress of the human mind. He was fond of the figure of a great river as suggesting the continuous irresistible and beneficent onward sweep of the spirit of the race. Any such attitude as that assumed by the pseudo-classical artist creates at the best an eddy, a side current apart from the main stream, and at the worst, as in the case of the mere imitations, becomes a stagnant shallow without life or motion. Overwhelmed by the treatment of the genuine classic, they may say: "All the great things have been done; nothing remains but to enjoy them and imitate them." But after years of such enjoyment and such production what goal have we reached? Alas, one may be learned and distinguished "mais immobile, mais borné, fermé et tout à fait étranger à la vraie activité intellectuelle toujours renaissante."³ The artist and "critiques classiques qui se flattent de n'avoir pas varié depuis trente ans, ceux qui n'ont cessé de rester fidèles dans leurs recommandations à tous les procédés et à toutes les routines d'académie et d'atelier," must give way in favor of the really classical writers who reinterpret the ancient spirit in a modern way, for example as did André Chénier⁴ when he cried in a famous passage: "Sur des penses nouveaux faisons des vers antiques." Chénier's work breathes the sanity, the beauty, the indefinable exaltation, the inimitable distinction of the truly classical.

The French tradition is, then, the classical tradition modified as a matter of course by a certain Gallic quality which harmonizes on the whole with the other elements. There are lands, Sainte-Beuve says, where the classic tradition cannot survive: "Il y a des langues et des

¹ *Cahiers*, p. 166.

² *Causeries du lundi*, XII, 15. See also on imitation of ancients, *ibid.*, III, 49.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 73.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, X, 438.

littératures ouvertes de toutes parts et non circonscrites auxquelles je ne me figure pas qu'on puisse appliquer le mot de classique. Je ne me figure pas qu'on dise 'les classiques allemands.'"¹ But to the Frenchman there is something native and congenial in the tradition—the word comes naturally to the lips in speaking of his best work; he adopts the ancient *raison* and sanity of the classic; he lightens and modifies them by his own sociability,² and by his theatricality.³ The core of French thought and artistic achievement is the Hellenic tradition molded and adapted by the exigencies of modern time and place.⁴

Sainte-Beuve's classicism occasionally assumed the form of a humanistic protest against the presumptuous excesses of scientific naturalism, the superincumbent weight of vapid idealism, or the lawless profusion of irresponsible romanticism. This brings us, however, by another path upon that irreconcilable contradiction in his thought that we were obliged to recognize in studying his naturalism, the contradiction between the humanist and the scientist, the devotee of tradition and the believer in progress, the apostle of the ancients and the champion of the moderns, for Sainte-Beuve was all these at one and the same time; chameleon-like he changed color with the material he was concerned with, or rather, true to one of his own principles, he took on the tone and atmosphere of the work he discussed.

This dual activity of his mind produced his divided and discordant attitude toward his own epoch. The humanist in him assured him that the nineteenth century was a degeneration, his belief in a preceding classical age compelled him to view his own time as decadent. The distinguishing mark of decadence is exaggeration—of excellences, till

¹ *Cahiers*, p. 108.

² "Le Français est sociable. ... Il faut laisser aux peuples divers leur génie, tout en cherchant à le féconder et à l'étendre. Le Français est sociable, et il l'est surtout par la parole ... et les arts ont besoin, en général, pour lui plaire et pour réussir tout à fait chez lui, de rencontrer cette disposition première de son esprit et de s'identifier au moins en passant avec elle" (*Causeries du lundi*, IX, 311).

³ The entrance of Mâtho into Carthage through the viaduct in Flaubert's *Salammô*: "C'est bien de l'extraordinaire et du théâtral on l'avouera ... disait un de mes amis. ... 'Il y a toujours de l'opéra dans tout ce que font les Français, même ceux qui se piquent de réel.'" This "ami" is probably nonexistent, but Sainte-Beuve often used this device to say things he wished not to say in his own person (*Nouveaux lundis*, IV, 61).

⁴ "L'artiste doit être *de son temps*, doit porter dans son œuvre le cachet *de son temps*—à ce prix est la vie durable, comme le succès. ... Tâchons dans nos œuvres d'exprimer l'esprit de notre siècle, de dire à notre heure ce qui n'a pas été dit encore' (*Causeries du lundi*, XII, 15).

they become defects or at least mannerisms; of defects, till they become unpardonable faults. It is precisely this exaggeration, this over-emphasis, which Sainte-Beuve finds to be the main fault of his contemporaries. "J'ai le deuil dans le cœur," he cries bitterly, "j'ai le deuil de la civilisation que je sens périr. Oh! comme on comprend mieux [by contrast] en ce moment que c'est une invention délicate et sublime."¹ The Romantics have succeeded in destroying delicacy, the indispensable element in good taste: "Nous allons tomber dans une grossièreté immense, le peu qui nous restait de la *Princesse de Clèves* va s'abîmer pour jamais et s'abolir";² and again, "L'époque devient grossière, elle n'estime que la gros qu'elle prend pour le grand; elle se prend à l'étiquette, à la montre, à ce qui peut faire du bruit, ou être utile positivement; l'esprit littéraire véritable est tout le contraire de cela."³ This was his constant quarrel with those of his own time—that they were guilty of exaggeration, they offered a gross superabundance, they displayed force raised to the power of mere violence—and the egregious thing and the dangerous thing in his eyes was that they made a virtue of all this. "Je le sais, la doctrine du trop, de l'exagération dite légitime, de la monstruosité même, prise pour marque du génie, est à l'ordre du jour." This is repugnant to his humanistic good taste. "Je demande," he continues, "à n'en être [de la doctrine] que sous toute réserve; j'habite volontiers en deçà, et j'ai gardé de mes vieilles habitudes littéraires le besoin de ne pas me fatiguer et même le désir de me plaire à ce que j'admire."⁴ The same avowal is in this: "J'ai, je l'avoue, en matière de goût, un grand faible; j'aime ce qui est agréable."⁵ Here speaks the humanist, the aesthetic in his call for pleasantness in art, in his avowal of his demand that it yield pleasure, and in his illusions of decadence.

At the cost of what may seem only a slightly relevant discussion, it seems well to say something further here about Sainte-Beuve's view of his contemporaries, of the exponents of both schools, the romanticists and the realists. It must be remembered that he was himself in his youth of the literary household of romanticism. He surrendered himself completely (the only place or time in his life when he did surrender himself) to what afterward seemed to him the hypnotic domination of the Cénacle. Under this influence he wrote his *Joseph Delorme*, his novel *Volupté*, which to the Sainte-Beuve of the *Causeries* must have seemed the veriest Romantic indiscretions. However, all his life he

¹ *Cahiers*, p. 102.

² *Ibid.*, p. 85.

³ *Portraits contemporains*, V, 458.

⁴ *Nouveaux lundis*, VIII, 95.

⁵ *Ibid.*, X, 403.

kept a tender place in his heart for his early literary group.¹ He also retained throughout certain mental habits acquired in his Romantic days, and he often experienced a recrudescence of Romantic enthusiasm and idealism. But with the *Chateaubriand* in 1848 his classical revulsion of feeling set in, and artistically and professionally he changed camp. In 1858 he wrote this:

Le romantique a la nostalgie, comme Hamlet: il cherche ce qu'il n'a pas, et jusque par delà les nuages; il rêve, il vit dans les songes. Au dix-neuvième siècle, il adore le moyen âge; au dix-huitième, il est déjà révolutionnaire avec Rousseau. Au sens de Goethe, il y des romantiques de divers temps; le jeune homme de Chrysostome, Stagyre, Augustin dans sa jeunesse, étaient des romantiques, des Renés anticipés, des malades; mais c'étaient des malades pour guérir, et le Christianisme les a guéris; il a exorcisé le démon. Hamlet, Werther, Childe-Harold, les Renés purs, sont des malades pour chanter et souffrir, pour jouir de leur mal, des romantiques plus ou moins par dilettantisme—la maladie pour la maladie.²

To romanticism he traced many of the faults that he found in his later contemporaries; he condemned it as full of affectation, as exaggerated to the point of violence, as guilty of the repudiation of reality and sanity.

The case was different, though not better, with the realists. They were content to linger in the region of mere fact, whereas he regarded bare fact as only the foundation on which to erect the literary superstructure. He attributes to the "écrivains dits *réalistes*" the fault "de chercher peut-être outre mesure la vérité."³ His most trenchant criticism of the realists occurs in his studies of Flaubert and of the De Goncourts. He blames them, not for setting down in their search for reality what is vulgar and mean, but for going out of their way to find the vulgar and mean.⁴ This obsession of the realists with the disagreeable, with what he calls the "aggressively unpleasant," he deplores and regards as the evidence of their decadence. Their sordid detail, their lack of beauty and elevation, their preoccupation with the mean and vulgar put them out of court as artists.⁵

This concludes the discussion of Sainte-Beuve's attitude toward tradition as one of the great critical criteria. We may say that we have in general exhibited the following: He recognized a prevailing tradition, the classical, based on Greek and Latin standards and coming again

¹ Harper, *op. cit.*, p. 14; cf. *Causeries du lundi*, III, 97, and *Cahiers*, p. 132, etc.

² *Causeries du lundi*, XV, 371.

⁴ *Ibid.*, X, 400; IV, 40.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 14.

⁵ Cf. on Zola, *Correspondance*, II, 314.

into full bloom in France in the seventeenth century; he formed his opinions on the nature, form, and content of literature under the influence of this tradition, modified by a slight measure of Romantic liberalism, a survival from the ideals and associations of his early literary life.

Much light is thrown upon Sainte-Beuve's taste and its practical critical operation by observing what authors he admired and used as bases of comparison. Whom did he regard as classics, as types, whose standing was firm enough, whose repute was universal enough to qualify them as standards of measurement? The following names give us certain of his *pierres de touche*; but they do not exhaust his list. Foremost, of course, among his models and standards stand, as the great poets of all time, Homer, Horace, Shakespeare; and there too we find the greatest of critics, Goethe—"notre maître à tous." These are the fixed stars in his firmament, the constellations by which he steered his critical craft. It is Shakespeare and Goethe whom he continually and most effectively used as measures of excellence. He put no French writer beside them, acknowledging that France had not produced a supreme literary master. Euripides, Sophocles, Cicero, Quintilian, Virgil, among the ancients, are placed only a little lower on the scale than Horace and Homer. From across the Channel, next to Shakespeare, he placed high the great English classicist, Pope, to whom he very frequently referred.¹ It has been necessary to speak in many connections of Sainte-Beuve's unlimited admiration of the great French classic writers. Montaigne and Rabelais are established as masters before the seventeenth century; then come Boileau, La Fontaine, Racine, Molière,² Bossuet, Mme de Sévigné, Mme de Maintenon, and later, in the next century, Fénelon, and Voltaire—all these claim his fealty. André Chénier was to him the ideal literary artist, combining classical spirit and form with modern subject-matter.³ In the nineteenth century his enthusiasm centered mainly about Mme de Staël and Chateaubriand. The romanticists and the realists, who constituted the main body of nineteenth-century literary artists, were too individualistic to stand as types and standards, and the inevitable blindness of contemporaneity no doubt obscured some of their merits.

The fourth of Sainte-Beuve's criteria for judgment which may be deduced from his work, for nowhere does he baldly lay it down as a

¹ His appreciation of Pope he expressed in a fine essay (*Nouveaux lundis*, VIII, 104, *passim*).

² Cf. *ibid.*, V, 277 ff., where he takes these as standards and types.

³ On André Chénier see *Causeries du lundi*, X, 438; III, 114, etc.

principle, is *logic and consistency*. It is so essential and fundamental a requisite that the artist shall not contradict himself, shall think straight and use the right words to express his thoughts, that Sainte-Beuve must have felt there was no need to establish as a principle that these things should be demanded of all writers. Any work must be logical and consistent in the mass as well as in the detail. It is, however, easy and certain to infer his thought on this matter from passages like the following on Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*. Zola has claimed that vice and virtue are products like acid and sugar, and Sainte-Beuve comments:

Il s'ensuivrait qu'un crime expliqué et motivé comme celui que vous exposez n'est pas chose si miraculeuse et si monstrueuse, et on se demande dès lors pourquoi tout cet appareil de remords qui n'est qu'une transformation et une transposition du remords moral ordinaire, du remords chrétien, et une sorte d'enfer retourné.¹

Here Zola is accused of inconsistency and illogicality in the conception and application of his formula; evidently he violates Sainte-Beuve's fourth principle.

Sainte-Beuve held in theory that the effect of a work of art on the community from a moral point of view may be an index as to its ultimate merit. However, he himself definitely limits the field of such judgments.

Le poète dramatique [and this is equally true of all artists] ... ne songe point à faire un ouvrage moral; il pense à faire un ouvrage vrai puisé dans la nature, dans la vie. ... Mais à cette hauteur, la nature vraie, mâle ou tendre, ... la nature humaine vertueusement malade, si je puis dire, produit le plus souvent, grace au génie et à un art tout plein d'elle, une impression morale qui ennoblit, qui élève, et qui surtout jamais ne corrompt.²

Sainte-Beuve recognized a moral function of a great work even though the author had no moralistic intention. On the contrary a moralistic book is rarely if ever a work of art and therefore falls between two stools failing of both its purposes.³ The last clause of the quotation, "qui surtout jamais ne corrompt," indicates clearly, however, that Sainte-Beuve demanded of a work of literature that it should not be corrupting; in other words, that he held morality as one of his criteria. The presence of several strictures upon various writers for indecency clinches this proof. It is easy to overemphasize this point. Sainte-Beuve was by nature and training intellectual rather than ethical in his point of view; he was steeped in the doctrines of relativity, his scientific studies had tended to give his mind a deterministic bias, and, of course, he could not be aware

¹ *Correspondance*, II, 314.

² *Causeries du lundi*, X, 499.

³ *Ibid.*

of the recent sociological view of morals as social agreement. In his earlier life, too, he had been accused with some semblance of justice of having written poetry and a novel immoral in their tendency, and this, together with his belief that criticism should be as generous as possible, made him careful about casting the critical stone of moral stricture. Rarely indeed did he throw what he calls "le pavé accablant, dont on s'arme sans cesse, qu'on jette à la tête de tout nouveau venu, avec une vivacité et une promptitude qui ne laissent pas d'être curieuses si l'on songe à quelques-uns de ceux qui en jouent de la sorte."¹ He defended Feydeau, Flaubert, and others from the charge of immorality, making himself more often *advocatus diaboli* than the defender of conventional standards. His morality differed perhaps from the ordinary but was always present in his mind as a necessary concomitant of the truly great work.

If we have drawn the proper inferences from the material cited we may assume that we have established the following regarding Sainte-Beuve as aesthetic critic:

1. He was an aesthetic as well as a scientific and historical critic, evaluating the artistic aspects of his material.
2. He was a judicial critic and believed it was his province to offer a final appraisal of a work, based on certain abiding principles.
3. These major criteria or abiding principles are four: taste, reality, tradition, and logic and consistency; to which we add morality as a fifth, though minor, one.

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, XV, 347.

V. THE QUALIFICATIONS OF THE CRITIC

In Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, Sainte-Beuve finds a portrait of a critic which he acknowledges as a presentation of his own ideal.¹ So satisfied is he with this portrait that he says he would like to see it hung above the work table of every critic, where he could have it continually before his eyes. Pope's lines are these:

But where's the man, who counsel can bestow,
Still pleas'd to teach, and yet not proud to know?
Unbiass'd, or by favour, or by spite;
Not dully prepossess'd, nor blindly right;
Tho' learn'd, well-bred; and tho' well-bred, sincere,
Modestly bold, and humanly severe:
Who to a friend his faults can freely show,
And gladly praise the merit of a foe?
Blest with a taste exact, yet unconfin'd;
A knowledge both of books and human kind:
Gen'rous converse; a soul exempt from pride;
And love to praise, with reason on his side?²

Every item of this pointed antithetical "character" of Pope's is significant. It is in itself of great significance that Sainte-Beuve—the later Sainte-Beuve—should have found his ideal expressed by Pope. The representative English classicist had a profound influence on Sainte-Beuve, having embodied in his work and theory many of the things which the great Frenchman coveted for the criticism of his own day and nation.

Sainte-Beuve himself paints an independent portrait of the ideal critic:

Le jour où viendrait un critique qui aurait le profond sentiment historique et vital des lettres comme l'a M. Taine, qui plongerait comme lui ses racines jusqu'aux sources, en poussant d'autre part ses verts rameaux sous le soleil, et en même temps qui ne supprimerait point ... que-dis-je? qui continuerait de respecter et de respirer la fleur sobre, au fin parfum, des Pope, des Boileau, des Fontanes, ce jour-là le critique complet serait trouvé; la réconciliation entre les deux écoles serait faite.³

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, VIII, 121.

² *Essay on Criticism*, ll. 630 ff.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, VIII, 115.

In brief, he dreams of a critic who can reconcile within himself humanism and determinism, science and tradition, aesthetics and history. Sainte-Beuve fulfils in some measure his own dream, for while he may not have made an integral union of the two schools, he did create a working federation between them. He fears, however, that any attempt to mix this critical oil and water will result in a mere emulsion and not in a true stable compound. Indeed, in the very passage quoted above his own logic drives him on into the rather sad admission: "Mais je demande l'impossible; on voit bien que c'est un rêve."² Elsewhere, in the well-known article on Bayle, the source for much of the information about what Sainte-Beuve demanded of the critic, he says:

Nous ne saisissons et ne relèverons en lui que les traits essentiels du génie critique qu'il représente a un degré merveilleux dans sa pureté et son plein, dans son empressement discursif, dans sa curiosité affamée, dans sa sagacité pénétrante, dans sa versatilité perpétuelle et son appropriation à chaque chose.³

We must superadd these finer though secondary qualities to the list of those essential in his ideal critic.

When we come to gather Sainte-Beuve's specifications as to the equipment and qualifications of the critic, it seems necessary to begin with his doctrine of the critic's spontaneity—even in the old phrasing that the critic is born and not made. It is first by virtue of native power that the ideal critic penetrates to the heart of life and art, and this intuitive penetration leads him into an appreciation not otherwise attainable.³ "L'homme de talent l'est *par nature*," and he means this to apply in the field of criticism as in other fields.⁴ The critic's intuitive discernment must be recognized as a type of genius. "La nature crée le grand critique; de même qu'elle confère à quelques hommes le don du commandement. D'autres influent plus sensiblement, agitent, débordent, entraînent; le vrai juge, le vrai critique, par quelque mots établit le balance."⁵ Lacking this native gift the critic is seriously limited: "Je ne sais pas de preuve plus sûre qu'on n'est pas fait pour être un vrai critique, que d'aller préférer d'*instinct* dans ce qu'on a sous les yeux un demi-talent à un talent et, qui pis est, à un génie."⁶ I have italicized in this passage the word of greatest importance; when Sainte-Beuve speaks of judgment as *instinctive* he seems to place it on the fundamental basis as a native gift—to make of it, as it were, another sense. Indeed, he says precisely: "L'autorité du vrai critique *ce* compose

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, VIII, 116.

² *Portraits littéraires*, I, 365.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 65.

⁴ *Portraits contemporains*, V, 457.

⁵ *Chateaubriand*, II, 115.

⁶ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 117

de bien des éléments complexes comme pour le grand médecin; mais au fond il y a là un sens apart."¹ Criticizing certain figures of speech in a style that he is studying, he exclaims: "Quand on ne *sent* pas une fois ce qu'il y a de bizarre dans ... ces nuances incohérentes, on ne le sentira jamais."² The important word here is *sent*, which carries an implication of physical perception. Of Grimm, whom he admired, he says: "Quand la nature a une fois doué quelqu'un de cette vivacité de tact et de cette susceptibilité d'impression, et que l'imagination créatrice ne s'y joint pas, ce quelqu'un est né critique, c'est-à-dire amateur et juge des créations des autres."³

He points out, as evidence that the fundamental elements in the critical faculty are congenital and not acquired, the fact that very ignorant persons sometimes arrive at the most penetrating appreciation by mere intuition;

J'aime le naïf dans les jugements. Je remarque comme les jeunes filles du peuple sentent souvent bien la poésie. La petite bohème qui ne sait pas lire juge à merveille des vers de Chénier, de Lamartine, de Mme Valmore; elle s'écrie aux plus beaux, aux passionnés surtout, et aux plus tendres. Et quant à Victor Hugo—

him, too, she judges with correct appreciation.⁴ Of course, however, the fact that an untrained person may by intuition reach a correct estimate in artistic matters does not argue that he who aspires to be an authoritative critic can forego any aspect of educational equipment.

The critic's sensitiveness to impression has its active as well as its receptive side. Sainte-Beuve, telling a story of Pope to the effect that attempting to read aloud a passage from Homer he was so moved by its beauty and pathos that tears interrupted his reading, comments: "nul exemple ne nous prouve mieux que le sien combien la faculté de critique émue, délicate, est une faculté active. On ne sent pas, on ne perçoit pas de la sorte quand on n'a rien à rendre. Ce goût, cette sensibilité si éveillée, si soudaine, suppose bien de l'imagination derrière."⁵ The sensitive critical faculty serves in literary history as a barometer to forecast the spiritual and artistic weather, or rather climate, of a period. The acute critic is able to tell in advance the moral meteoric condition of his age:

Il est des organisations délicates et nerveuses qui sentent vingt-quatre heures à l'avance les changements de temps, qui les devinent en quelque sorte.

¹ *Chateaubriand*, II, 115.

² *Causeries du lundi*, VII, 339.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

⁴ *Cahiers*, p. 32.

⁵ *Nouveaux lundis*, VIII, 118.

Tel doit être l'esprit du critique par rapport au jugement du public. Il faut que sa montre avance de cinq minutes au moins sur le cadran de l'Hôtel-de-Ville.¹

The critic is not then a *poète avorti*, or, according to Coleridge's phrase, a failure in letters turned reviewer, or any other kind of an artist who has failed in his chosen career and taken to criticism with a view to avenging himself upon an unappreciative world. Balzac wrote of a certain sculptor who had not succeeded in his art: "Il passa critique, comme tous les impuissants qui mentent à leurs débuts." Sainte-Beuve proceeds:

Ce dernier trait peut être vrai d'un artiste sculpteur ou peintre qui, au lieu de se mettre à l'œuvre, passe son temps à disserter et à raisonner; mais, dans l'ordre de la pensée, cette parole, qui revient souvent sous la plume de toute une école de jeunes littérateurs, est à la fois une injustice et une erreur.²

The implications are plain. The critic, like the dramatist, the novelist, the poet, is a creator, since he too works with words and ideas, building them into edifices of his own—a creator in a different manner, perhaps, but not in a different measure from those other literary artists. He may borrow ideas, but what creative worker does not, upon occasion, borrow? He quotes Pope, who says that true taste among critics is as rare as true genius among poets and that they each draw a separate and yet kindred inspiration from heaven—one inspiration for judging others, the other inspiration for creating poetry. Sainte-Beuve proceeds, translating Pope, "Quelques-uns ont d'abord passé pour beaux esprits, ensuite pour poètes; puis, ils se sont faits critiques, et ils se sont montrés tout uniment des sots sous toutes les formes." He then adds for himself:

Cela est d'avance une réponse à ces artistes orgueilleux et vains, impatientes de toute observation, comme nous en avons connu, et qui, confondant tout, ne savaient donner qu'une seule définition du critique; "Qu'est un critique? C'est un impuissant qui n'a pu être artiste." Tout artiste présomptueux avait trop intérêt à cette définition du critique: il s'en est suivi, pendant des années, la pleine licence et comme l'orgie des talents.³

Not only is the critic not an *artiste avorti*, but he should ideally have little or none of the peculiar inspiration of the imaginative artist in him: "Il ne faut pas avoir le talent trop empressé quand on est critique;

¹ *Portraits contemporains*, V, 457.

² *Causeries du lundi*, II, 455.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, VIII, 119.

autrement dès que l'on commence à lire quelque chose, voilà le talent qui part, qui se jette à la traverse, et l'on n'a pas fini de juger."¹

Une des conditions du génie critique ... c'est de n'avoir pas *d'art* à soi, de style; ... quand on a un style ... on a une préoccupation bien légitime de sa propre œuvre, qui se fait à travers l'œuvre de l'autre, et quelquefois à ses dépens. Cette distraction limite le génie critique. ... De plus quand on a un *art* à soi ... on a un goût décidé qui ... atteint vite ses restrictions.²

Is it not, indeed, almost a commonplace that a practitioner of any art or profession makes a poor judge of it, since in most cases he cannot divest himself of his attitude toward it; he forms his opinion in advance, he has prejudged and is therefore prejudiced? Sainte-Beuve has spoken on this point:

J'ai souvent pensé que le mieux pour le critique qui voudrait se réserver le plus de largeur de vues, ce serait de n'avoir aucune faculté d'artiste, de peur de porter ensuite dans ses divers jugements la secrète prédilection d'un père et d'un auteur intéressé.³

He regarded it as a serious misfortune for the criticism of his own day that economic conditions often forced creative writers, under the necessity of making a living, to take up the pen of the critic, doing violence to their own talent, coarsening their finer sensibilities, and at the same time lowering the standard of criticism. This latter would follow as a matter of course when the field of criticism was invaded by writers who held criticism in contempt, regarding their own essays in it as mere potboilers, reserving their care and enthusiasm for their own creative work.⁴

The critical faculty shares three qualities with the creative faculty: a keen perception of reality and of essential value, a keenness of perception which the ordinary man does not possess—"l'enthousiasme et l'amour du beau,"⁵ and the love of truth; and is equally "l'ennemi des engouements et de tous les charlatanismes."⁶

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, XI, 505.

² *Portraits littéraires*, I, 376.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, I, 10.

⁴ Sainte-Beuve when he started his critical career seems to have had something of this in him, for he claimed to be primarily a poet. This is just what happens in the case of the poet: "Le journal ... a créé une charge qui réclame impérieusement son homme; c'est celle de critique universel et ordinaire. Vous l'êtes ou vous ne l'êtes pas par disposition première et naturelle, qu'importe! il vous faut à toute force le devenir. Les poètes, lorsqu'on fait d'eux des critiques ... ont une difficulté particulière à vaincre; ils ont un goût personnel très-prononcé," etc. (*ibid.*, VI, 296).

⁵ *Causeries du lundi*, VII, 308.

⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 387.

A main essential qualification of the critic is a power of perceiving differences, an appreciative sense of the many, and an ability to enter into and experience imaginatively very diverse circumstances and states of consciousness. Diderot possessed in a marvelous degree this faculty of demi-metamorphosis "qui est le jeu et le triomphe de la critique, et qui consiste à se mettre à la place l'auteur et au point de vue du sujet qu'on examine, à lire tout écrit *selon l'esprit qui l'a dicté*."¹ Sainte-Beuve uses the figure elsewhere of the critic as a winding river which reflects on its placid bosom everything it passes. He says of De Laprade:

Ce qui m'y frappe avant tout et partout, c'est combien l'auteur, soit qu'il raisonne, soit qu'il interroge l'histoire littéraire, ne comprend que sa propre manière d'être et sa propre individualité; par cela même il nous avertit qu'il n'est pas un critique.²

He says of Taine that he is too single-minded to be a first-rate critic.³ His exhortation to his colleagues in criticism is: "Critiques curieux, imprévus, infatigables, prompts à tous sujets, soyons à notre manière comme ce tyran qui, dans son palais, avait trente chambres; et on ne savait jamais dans laquelle il couchait."⁴ The well-equipped critic has the ability to put himself at will in the place of another; it is his unquestioned privilege and duty to do this at need. He has the privilege, also unquestioned if not indeed unquestionable, of changing camps at will, of displaying first the converse then the reverse of every medal. That Sainte-Beuve writes with perfect penetration of Mme du Deffand constitutes no reason why he should not write with equal penetration of her deadly rival and mortal enemy Mlle de Lespinasse:

Le critique ne doit point avoir de partialité et n'est d'aucune coterie. Il n'épouse les gens que pour un temps, et ne fait que traverser les groupes divers sans s'y enchaîner jamais. Il passe résolument d'un camp à l'autre, et de ce qu'il a rendu justice d'un côté, ce ne lui est jamais une raison de la refuser à ce qui est vis-à-vis. Ainsi, tour à tour, il est à Rome ou à Carthage, tantôt pour Argos et tantôt pour Ilion.⁵

And elsewhere:

Le génie critique ... ne reste pas dans son centre ou à peu de distance; il ne se retranche pas dans sa cour, ni dans sa citadelle, ni dans son académie; il ne craint pas de se mésallier; il va partout, le long des rues, s'informant, accostant; la curiosité l'allèche ... il est ... tout à tous. ... Mais gare au retours! ... l'infidélité est un trait de ces esprits divers et intelligents.⁶

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 301.

⁴ *Portraits contemporains*, V, 457.

² *Nouveaux lundis*, I, 9.

⁵ *Causeries du lundi*, II, 121.

³ *Ibid.*, VIII, 80.

⁶ *Portraits littéraires*, I, 371.

His absolute freedom the ideal critic combines with a universal tolerance—to understand is to forgive—and he is indifferent to passions:

Cette indifférence du fond, il faut bien le dire, cette tolérance prompt, facile, aiguisée de plaisir, est une des conditions essentielles du génie critique, dont le propre, quand il est complet, consiste à courir au premier signe sur le terrain d'un chacun, à s'y trouver à l'aise, à s'y jouer en maître et à connaître de toutes choses.¹

In his political and literary career Sainte-Beuve availed himself of the privilege he claimed for the critic, having many times shifted his adherence: "J'ai vécu de bien des vies littéraires, et j'ai passé de douces heures d'entretien avec des hommes instruits de plus d'une école; il me semblait que j'étais de la leur, tant que je causais avec eux";² but he never gave any group the right to say, "He is one of us," he never surrendered himself completely, except once in his youth, when he adhered for a time to Hugo and the romanticists.

The critic's chameleon-like quality of adjusting himself to different camps, different persons, different subjects must not fail him when it is a question of adjusting himself to different aspects of the same subject, to the same subject under different lights or from diverse points of view:

Il est heureux pour les critiques de n'être point comme Montesquieu qui ne tirait jamais, disait-il, du moule de son esprit, qu'un seul portrait sur chaque sujet. Nous autres, nous avons à revenir sans cesse sur ce que nous avons déjà traité, à revenir vite, il est vrai, mais toujours par un coin plus ou moins vif. Nous avons à tirer sur un même fond mainte épreuve, et dont aucune ne soit semblable. Il ne faut point trop paraître redire, ni encore moins se contredire, il faut être dans un courant, dans un recommencement continu.³

His essays on Bossuet are sufficient witness to the fact that Sainte-Beuve was eminently skilful in treating a subject from many points of view.⁴

The really great critic has personal weight and influence, the mental and moral integrity to give authoritatively an opinion and then to defend it. He should feel certain of himself:

Johnson avait *un bon jugement* et *l'autorité* nécessaire pour le faire valoir, qualités essentielles à tout critique et que les critiques de nos jours paraissent, au contraire, trop oublier: car, avec tous leurs beaux et brillants développements, ils trouvent souvent le moyen de n'avoir ni *jugement* ni *autorité*. Villemain, dans ses jugements contemporains, n'a jamais été que flatterie et complaisance. Du bon sens *sterling*, voilà ce qu'avait Johnson, et c'est à quoi toutes les malices et les fines ironies ne suppléent pas.⁵

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 369.

² *Nouveaux lundis*, V, 332.

³ *Causeries du lundi*, X, 55.

⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, III, 45; XIII, 248, etc.

⁵ *Ibid.*, XI, 490.

He calls this certainty and ability to give judgment "cette irritabilité de bon sens et de raison qui fait dire 'non' avec véhémence."¹ All the great critics have in matters of taste this "susceptibilité vive, passionnée, irritable,"² which leads them, of course, in extreme cases to dogmatism. But dogmatism is only the accentuation of a virtue; it is the manifestation of the critic's consciousness of his own authority:

Il y a dans cette autorité et dans l'importance de celui que l'exerce, quelque chose de vivant, de personnel, qui ne tient pas uniquement à ce qu'il écrit et qui ne s'y représente pas toujours, en entier, mais qui tient de plus près à l'homme même, à son geste, à son accent. Les mêmes choses dans d'autres bouches n'ont le même sens ni le même poids.³

The born critic has thus an oracular power which the made critic does not share: "Mme. d'Épinay disait, 'Il ne me reste aucun doute lorsque M. Grimm a prononcé,'" and Sainte-Beuve adds, "Ce caractère d'oracle est assez naturel à tous les maîtres critiques."⁴ Personal authority is necessary to the judge: "Or, cela est triste à dire, le critique est un juge, il n'est pas un homme de qualité ni un chevalier,"⁵ and this personal authority makes the critic the power in art which he ought to be; conscious of the rectitude of his verdicts, he feels himself able and willing to condemn the bad and to praise the good.

The real credentials of the critic born to be a critic and possessing the requisite personal authority and independence of opinion are found in his judgments on his contemporaries. It is comparatively easy to judge Racine or Bossuet, for opinion is settled about them, but when one has to *frayer le chemin* the critic's metal is tested:

Le don de la critique a été accordé à quelques-uns ... ce don devient même du génie lorsqu'au milieu des révolutions du goût, il s'agit de discerner avec netteté, sans aucune mollesse, ce qui vivra, si dans une œuvre nouvelle l'originalité réelle suffit à racheter les défauts ... et d'oser dire tout cela avant tous et le dire d'un ton qui impose et se fasse écouter.⁶

Whatever his native gifts, the critic will need to be prepared for his work by the widest accumulation of knowledge and the most painstaking discipline, since it is true that "le plus souvent nous ne jugeons pas les autres, nous jugeons nos propres facultés dans les autres."⁷ Then it behooves us in every possible sense to increase our knowledge

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, II, 19.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, VII, 305.

² *Ibid.*, VII, 310.

⁵ *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 12.

³ *Chateaubriand*, II, 115.

⁶ *Chateaubriand*, II, 115.

⁷ *Cahiers*, p. 34; cf. Anatole France, *La vie littéraire*, Vol. I, p. iv.

and refine our tastes. Sainte-Beuve insisted that in order to approximate an understanding of our predecessors, or for that matter of our contemporaries, we must be able to enter into their consciousness, in a sense to impersonate them. To this end a store of knowledge practically limitless is necessary: "La critique est un métier à part qui demande bien des précautions et des préparations."¹ It asks for erudition, for the widest possible knowledge of life, for experience in the other arts—no amount and no kind of training come amiss in the critic's calling. Of Bayle, Sainte-Beuve says that while he was little attracted by mathematics which "absorbe—détourne un esprit critique, chercheur et à la piste des particularités," he was benefited by his study of dialectics.² It is in Saint-Beuve's opinion a profound misfortune for our age that so many voices are raised in assumed authority whose owners are not experienced and not educated. Such persons do not attempt to judge music or painting; they leave that task to those having some technical knowledge; but everybody seems willing to offer judgments on literature:

Les œuvres et productions de l'esprit, quand elles éclatent point au théâtre par de grandes et vivantes créations, ... sont d'une appréciation infiniment plus discrète et plus voilée, ... et elles exigent, pour être senties convenablement, des esprits plus avertis de longue main et plus préparés. Il y faut tant de préparation en effet, que je me dis quelquefois qu'au milieu de cette vie pressée, affairée, bourrée de travaux et d'études, ... ceux même, qui sont du même métier ... n'auront pas toujours le temps, l'espace, la liberté et l'élasticité d'impressions nécessaires pour être justes envers leurs devanciers.³

While it is true that this wide sweep of knowledge and experience is important for the critic's best equipment, that his studies in any science, in philosophy, in religion never come amiss, giving him that most desirable sense of authority and mastery,⁴ yet it is naturally in the field of literature itself that the literary critic will perfect himself. A wide and rich knowledge of literary history and familiarity with the essentials of literary tradition constitute his indispensable preparation.⁵

¹ *Correspondance*, I, 310; *Nouveaux lundis*, IX, 66. He repeats this same outburst elsewhere: "Nous vivons dans un temps où chacun se croit critique et se pose comme tel ... c'est le pis-aller du moindre grimaud (comme on disait du temps de Boileau), du moindre apprenti littéraire que de trancher de l'Aristarque en feuilleton" (*Chateaubriand*, II, 114).

² *Portraits littéraires*, I, 381.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, IX, 66.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, II, 379, where he praises de Broglie as critic for his great knowledge and immense capacity for labor.

⁵ *Nouveaux lundis*, I, 305.

First in order of importance is the respectful study of the ancients and veneration of our legacy from them:

La vraie et juste disposition à leur égard est un premier fonds de respect, et tout au moins beaucoup de sérieux, de circonspection, d'attention, une patiente et longue étude de la société, de la langue, un grand compte à tenir des jugements des Anciens les uns sur les autres.

And he adds an urgency that we treat the classics not from our point of view but from theirs.¹ The achievement of this point of view is a business of arduous scholarship and disciplined sympathy:

N'aimer en littérature qu'à s'occuper du présent et du livre du jour, ... c'est suivre et courir le succès, ce n'est pas aimer les Lettres elles-mêmes, dont le propre est la perpétuité, la mémoire, et la variété dans le souvenir.²

He avers that this achievement does not lose its value when we have appreciated the classics, but persists as the best possible apparatus for appreciating and judging our literary contemporaries.

The genuine critic who aims at real and full sincerity must be unhampered by social relations and obligations, private or political. He must not tie himself up in embarrassing friendships nor commit himself to narrowing hostilities; he must maintain the independence of his judgment. Of Hoffmann, Sainte-Beuve says: "Il a bien des qualités du vrai critique, conscience, indépendance, des idées, un avis à lui."³ Elsewhere he says: "Le critique a des amis, je l'espère, mais il ne doit pas avoir d'amitiés littéraires *quand même*, et qui le déterminent ou l'enchaînent d'avance à un jugement trop favorable."⁴ La Harpe, for example, having fallen in love with Mme de Genlis, abrogated all critical intelligence, a weakness which brings down on him Sainte-Beuve's unqualified scorn.⁵ Bayle on the contrary was never in love⁶ and is to be admired for his "parfaite indépendance, indépendance par rapport à l'or et par rapport aux honneurs."⁷ The ideal savant "vit seul, sans famille, sans enfants,"⁸ free from the burden either of dire poverty or of cloying wealth:

Un critique ne doit pas avoir trop d'amis, de relations de monde, de ces obligations demandées par les convenances. Sans être précisément des corsaires

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, I, 305.

⁵ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 28.

² *Ibid.*, VI, 25.

⁶ *Portraits littéraires*, I, 379.

³ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 385.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 386.

⁴ *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 12.

⁸ *Nouveaux lundis*, IX, 98.

comme on l'a dit, nous avons besoin de courir nos bordées au large: il nous faut nos coudées franches.¹

He must be equally detached from friends and from enemies in order to be neutral or at least impartial: "Être critique, c'est tout soumettre à l'examen, et les idées et les faits, et même les textes; c'est de ne procéder en rien par prévention et enthousiasme."² One may see that in this matter Sainte-Beuve placed his requirement so high that he himself fell laughably short of it. He hated, and hated cordially, not to say vehemently. In reading his essays one has constantly to discount this or the other statement because of the element of personal spite and prejudice that enters into it. While he was the most catholic of critics he was by no means the most impartial. It is curious that he was not aware of this, for he obviously and sometimes ostentatiously tried to be fair.³ But his ideal critic "ne devrait pas être envieux. Plus il y a de talents et plus j'en comprends, plus j'ai raison de dire: Mon affaire est bonne."⁴ He agrees entirely with Pope, whom he thus paraphrases:

Pour être un bon et parfait critique, Pope le savait bien, il ne suffit pas de cultiver et d'étendre son intelligence, il faut encore purger à tout instant son esprit de toute passion mauvaise, de tout sentiment équivoque; il faut tenir son âme en bon et loyal état.⁵

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, II, 107. He envies Scherer because, living as he did in Geneva, he was able to speak his mind with no personal animus involved (*ibid.*, XV, 57). Sainte-Beuve himself, through the medium of Juste Olivier, the Geneva publisher, had such an outlet for a number of years and succeeded in telling the truth or at least in giving his candid opinion on many people whom he would otherwise have been afraid to attack. Cf. Harper, *Sainte-Beuve*, p. 266.

² *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 11.

³ He repeats many times that he is trying to be neutral and impartial. Let a few instances suffice. He is going to speak, he says, of Pontmartin: "Mon désir serait de le faire dans un parfait esprit d'impartialité" (I have quoted this before, *ibid.*, p. 1). Again, a propos of Pontmartin, who has called Sainte-Beuve's criticism "neutral," the latter writes: "Je ne mettrai pas d'insistance à me défendre, car c'est bien moi qui représente cette *neutralité*, que j'aimerais aussi entendre appeler tantôt *impartialité* et tantôt *curiosité* d'intelligence et d'observation" (*ibid.*, p. 9). In still another passage he claims to be able to write impartially of Marie Antoinette because he has been raised neither royalist nor republican (*ibid.*, VIII, 315). Pontmartin's main fault as a critic is attacking his subjects with a purpose. Bayle, on the other hand, is one of the finest examples of lack of prejudice, of impartiality in the critic (*Portraits littéraires*, I, 369).

⁴ *Portraits contemporains*, V, 457.

⁵ *Nouveaux lundis*, VIII, 121.

This true critic having purged bitterness and other evil passions from his soul is urbane and moderate: "Le critique acariâtre, fût-il exacte, n'y saurait prétendre (à l'urbanité)."¹ He censures severely those critics whose vocabulary contains only harsh words, contending that they would better not speak at all than merely to condemn,² for a critic, let us repeat, should always have in him a place *pour un certain contraire, une oreille pour l'accusé*. In the Bayle article Sainte-Beuve adds the following points to his analysis of the essential qualities of the critic: Disillusionment,³ a universal and indiscriminate curiosity,⁴ common sense,⁵ and freedom from religious and patriotic prejudice,⁶ but he finds that Bayle, even Bayle, the great critic, was completely lacking in aesthetic sentiment.⁷

In summary, Sainte-Beuve would like to stipulate for his critic the inborn critical faculty, a sort of superior sense which, so far as it goes, is infallible; that kind and amount of dramatic imagination that enables him to put himself in the place of another, to envisage other circumstances and other times; an authoritative personality, giving him confidence and certainty; as much learning as may be, especially great knowledge of literature, its history and its tradition; independence, keeping him from entangling alliances and oppositions; an ability to keep his judgment unbiased and as kindly as possible; eagerness for beauty and unfailing openness to impression.

It would be very interesting and profitable to assemble in some order all that Sainte-Beuve said about actual critics, particularly those who have influenced him or especially interested him. But the large mass of material would unduly prolong this dissertation and quite upset its balance. It does seem essential, however, to glance at the subject to the extent of naming those critics who stand highest in his estimation. Pre-eminent among those whom he admires is Goethe, "le plus grand des critiques modernes et de tous les temps,"⁸ "ce roi de la critique";⁹

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 69.

² Cf. *Nouveaux lundis*, VI, 316, where he attacks Planche for his conceit and his unbearable harshness. Cf. also *Causeries du lundi*, XI, 464: "Génin est un *tape-dur*, il a toujours besoin de taper sur quelqu'un ... ces gens-là manquent de l'aménité et de la légèreté, qui ne devraient jamais se séparer des qualités vraiment littéraires."

³ *Portraits littéraires*, I, 366.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 369-70.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 377, 381.

⁷ *Nouveaux lundis*, IV, 108.

⁸ *Ibid.*, III, 265.

⁹ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 42.

"notre maître à tous." His supremacy among critics is attested by his ability to exemplify in his own work everything he adjudges good:

Goethe est le seul poète qui ait eu une faculté poétique à l'appui de chacune de ses compréhensions et de ses intelligences de critique, et qui ait pu dire à propos de tout de qu'il juge en chaque genre. "J'en ferai un parfait échantillon si je le veux."¹

The extent of Sainte-Beuve's admiration must be gauged by comparing the boundless enthusiasm of these passages with his customary conscious moderation.

Next to Goethe in his estimation, and undoubtedly more important in his influence, comes Boileau, the greatest of French critics: "S'il m'est permis de parler pour moi-même, Boileau est un des hommes qui m'ont le plus occupé depuis que je fais de la critique, et avec qui j'ai le plus vécu en idée."² To Sainte-Beuve, Boileau presents himself as the ideal critic, conditioned only by the limits of the century which circumscribed his knowledge. The great nineteenth-century critic felt a close kinship with his master of the seventeenth; it was his hope and his endeavor to perform for his own time the noble office performed for the classical age by Boileau.

Of great importance in Sainte-Beuve's estimation and deeply influential with him were Bayle³ and Mme de Staël. So great was his interest in the latter and his admiration of her work that she has worthily been called the heroine of the *Lundis*. Close below these two in Sainte-Beuve's gallery of critics comes Diderot, of whom he frequently expresses cordial admiration, calling him the founder of appreciative criticism, and Voltaire, whom he named "le plus grand esprit critique depuis Bayle."⁴ Among later Frenchmen he frequently mentions Fauriel, Joubert, and Fontanes.⁵

Prominent among those who influenced Sainte-Beuve's critical thought was Alexander Pope.⁶ It should not be a matter for surprise that he, the greatest representative of the English classical school, should

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, I, 10. On his admiration for Goethe and kinship with him see Babbitt, *Masters of Modern French Criticism*, p. 127.

² *Causeries du lundi*, VI, 495.

³ As to Bayle's kinship with Sainte-Beuve, Babbitt is again illuminating (*op. cit.*, pp. 121 ff.). See also the article "Du génie critique et de Bayle" in *Portraits littéraires*, I, 364.

⁴ *Portraits littéraires*, I, 376.

⁵ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 376.

⁶ *Nouveaux lundis*, VIII, 121, etc.

have appealed to Sainte-Beuve, whose philosophical processes were on the whole English rather than French, and whose predilections for the classical tradition may be said to be a distinguishing characteristic of his later period. Of other English critics whom he knew, only Johnson and Jeffrey need be named.

With the exception of Goethe, Sainte-Beuve obviously knew little of German criticism. There is some indication that he knew something of the Schlegels and there is casual mention of Lessing. But the reflections are too few and fugitive to be collected.

The roster of the names of Sainte-Beuve's critical masters is, then, Goethe, Boileau, Mme de Staël, Diderot, Voltaire, Bayle, Pope, and Johnson.

VI. PRECEPTS AND *PROCÉDÉS*

The caption chosen for this section permits the collecting in one place of many matters, all important, some vital, in the criticism of Sainte-Beuve, which found no natural place in the more closely formulated divisions. There will be included here *obiter dicta*, conditions for special cases, the practical order of procedure in actual writing, personal reactions, and other such matter classifiable together only as being pertinent to Sainte-Beuve's ideas and methods of work. The material, discussion and notes, is arranged as nearly as possible in logical order, that is to say, in the order in which they would come into play in the critical process, as choosing a subject, clearing the ground, the method and point of attack, limiting and defining the subject, *et ainsi de suite*.

First as to Sainte-Beuve's method of choosing his subject and his favorite type of subject: his choice was only in part guided by his own fancy. He was a journalist writing for a living and obliged to handle timely subjects; his vehicle was the official organ of the government, and political considerations often dictated his choice. His own taste inclined him more toward pure literature, but his adherence to the government of the second empire forced him, in the *Causeries du lundi* and in the *Nouveaux lundis*, to concern himself with statesmen, with generals, with diplomats, public and official persons and their affairs. It is true, as has been noticed before, that he interpreted the term "literature" very liberally, so that we find him studying, for instance, the *Journal de la santé du roi Louis XIV*¹ or the *Touareg du nord* of Henri Duveyrier,² and he says elsewhere:

Ma vraie ambition dans mon genre a été celle-ci: étendre la critique littéraire à tous ceux qui ont écrit, peintres, architectes, naturalistes. ... De cette façon, on étend le champ de la critique littéraire autant que possible, on n'est fermé par aucun côté et l'on est, par conséquent, dans le véritable esprit moderne.³

At times he seemed to feel that his position as critic for the government and in the official journal constituted an obligation, as for example: "Condamné par circonstances à écrire sur tous sujets, je ne choisis pas, je traite les sujets qui s'offrent d'eux-mêmes à ma recontre; tâchant de

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 360.

² *Ibid.*, IX, 110.

³ *Correspondance*, II, 122.

faire honnêtement et en conscience mon métier, voilà tout."¹ His correspondence with the librarians of the Imperial Library throws some interesting light on this matter. But not even his somewhat dogged if not disinterested patriotism could persuade him to write on Napoleon III's *Life of Caesar*; he said he could not handle it without too great severity. During the later years of his connection with the government he never forgot that "*Le Moniteur s'affiche au coin des rues*,"² and he restrained himself with suitable discretion.

Dans cette place qui m'est accordée aux pages du *Moniteur*, que puis-je faire de mieux que de m'occuper, même au risque de remonter assez haut dans le passé, des grands noms qui ont honoré notre littérature et notre histoire? Il me semble quelquefois qu'il nous est permis d'étaler des estampes et des images aux yeux des passants, au bas des murs du Louvre. Lesquelles choisirions-nous? Certes, les plus célèbres et les plus riches en souvenirs, les plus historiques, les plus en accord avec le caractère et l'esprit du monument.³

In this passage we note two elements in his choice of a name for discussion, the element of its greatness and the element of its acceptability to the reading public, for he always hoped for some public approval. Hence the spark which set off Sainte-Beuve's train of thought, the occasion for the formulation and presentation of his studies, the excuse for the publication of his opinions, the opportunity for him to serve his public, from whatever point of view one regards the essay, was usually the appearance of a new book or a new edition of an old book.

The first *étape*, and an arbitrary though very actual determining factor in his choice, was the relation of the subject to the régime in control. This consideration was, however, largely inhibitive, deciding rather what names he would not treat. As to the more positive and specific grounds upon which he chose:

On peut être critique de bien des sortes: (a) sur des écrivains d'autrefois, sur d'anciens sujets qu'on traite et qu'on rajeunit sans les altérer et sans les fausser; (b) sur des auteurs modernes et des sujets à l'ordre du jour.⁴

And elsewhere he says:

Il est loin le temps où, la critique française commençant à peine, l'Abbé de Saint-Réal déclarait qu'on ne devait critiquer par écrit que les morts, et qu'il fallait se borner à juger en conversation les vivants. Aujourd'hui on se juge tous indifféremment les uns les autres, en public et par écrit, vivants, amis de la veille et confrères. Tâchons du moins que ce soit avec équité et sincérité.⁵

¹ *Correspondance*, I, 301.

² *Causeries du lundî*, X, 53.

³ *Ibid.*, IX, 80.

⁴ *Nouveaux lundis*, I, 263.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

I have before and from another point of view alluded to the fact that Sainte-Beuve chose for comment mediocre and minor men rather than the greatest. This statement has been made by many students and frequently with a certain derogatory implication. Babbitt points out that, though Sainte-Beuve again and again paid tribute to the great geniuses, he was above all scientifically interested in the more ordinary individual; "he cannot refrain from a certain satisfaction when an author and his work are less than unique and are therefore more capable of being explained."¹ Sainte-Beuve treats with just as much complacency the second-rate writers as those of the first rank, and he excels rather in discovering differences than degrees of genius; he can do better in pointing out peculiarities than in measuring greatness.² Many passages, however, serve to place this matter in a truer light, summing up convincingly his grounds for choosing less well-known men; such grounds are that they alone needed the services of criticism, the greatest masters having been adequately treated,³ and the fact that as a scientist Sainte-Beuve delighted in a man who, being less than unique, could be analyzed.⁴

A vrai dire, M. Coulmann me plaît, dans ses *Mémoires*, par ce côté même d'absence de toute originalité; il est l'expression honnête et facile du milieu où il vit, et il nous en marque la température assez exacte, sans y mêler la résistance ou le surcroît d'un caractère trop individuel.⁵

This less striking person being more really the product of his society than the man of genius is a better starting-point for those social studies in which Sainte-Beuve was eminently interested—"La critique littéraire, qui doit être heureuse et fière de s'élever toutes les fois qu'elle rencontre de grands sujets, se plaît pourtant, par sa nature, à ces sujets moyens qui ne sont point pour cela médiocres, et qui permettent à la morale sociale d'y pénétrer."⁶ The complement of this statement appears in this passage:

Les grands hommes sont sujets à faire illusion sur l'époque qu'ils éclairent et qu'ils remplissent brillamment jusqu'à éteindre quelquefois ce qui les entoure; les hommes secondaires, et pourtant essentiels ont l'avantage de nous faire pénétrer avec eux, sans éblouissement et sans faste, dans les parties restées à demi obscures, et dans les rouages mêmes de la machine dont ils étaient, à certain degré, un des ressorts.⁷

¹ See Babbitt, *Masters of Modern French Criticism*, pp. 160 ff.

² *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 18.

³ See the section on "The Functions of Criticism," p. 8.

⁴ Babbitt, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

⁶ *Causeries du lundi*, VII, 188.

⁵ *Nouveaux lundis*, IX, 141.

⁷ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 420.

Further he complains that French criticism has been too timid and conservative, keeping too much to the well-known subjects and the well-worn paths of criticisms, not venturing into these less-frequented regions where he feels it his duty to go.¹ In spite of the fact that he says, "je n'élude pas systématiquement tous les grands sujets qui passent,"² he "eludes" nearly all of the greatest names.

He attempts no profound study of Molière, he approaches Goethe almost solely on the side of social intercourse through the letters of Bettina and the conversations with Eckermann; he makes the same exception for Shakespeare that most of us make for the great literatures of the East, as something which the shortness of life exempts us from including in our world of thought; he has little to say about Dante, and that little inadequate; he manages to create for himself a sphere of philosophical activity in which we miss the luminous presence of Plato, and a train of dramatic tradition which can scarcely be said to reach back to Sophocles. These are serious omissions for which no amount of interest in Chapelle and Bachaumont, Rivarol, Dangeau and Mlle de La Vallière can compensate. But with the exception of Molière no French peak of genius was too high for his exploring foot.³

As regards extended and deliberate studies of the great men whom Harper mentions here, he is quite correct. Still it must be pointed out that these names and others only less great were constantly at Sainte-Beuve's pen point, exercising a dispersed but pervasive influence, receiving from him much incidental appreciation, and towering constantly in the background as standards, constituting a court of supreme appeal.⁴

Again, while it is true that very frequently Sainte-Beuve occupied himself with minor writers whom he rejoiced in as "specimens" more easily handled and more illustrative of principles than the anomalous geniuses, it is not the poor writers whom he advises us to study, but

¹ "Pourquoi sommes nous ainsi faits en France, que lorsqu'un homme distingué et de talent n'est pas entré à un certain jour dans le courant de la vogue et dans le train habituel de l'admiration publique, nous devenions si sujets à le négliger et à le perdre totalement de vue? Et au contraire, ceux qui sont une fois connus, adoptés par l'opinion et par la renommée, nous les avons sans cesse à la bouche et nous les accablons de couronnes" (*Causeries du lundi*, X, 446). Once the man has become famous we all see genius in everything he does. This, too, is notable: "... on pousse trop à l'admiration quand même, on ne juge plus; une fois le mot génie prononcé, tout est accepté, proclamé," etc. (*Correspondance*, II, 94).

² *Nouveaux lundis*, IV, 392.

³ Harper, *Sainte-Beuve*, p. 321.

⁴ For such appreciation see on Molière, *Nouveaux lundis*, V, 277; on Shakespeare, *Causeries du lundi*, XV, 336.

rather worthy and honorable writers of the second rank. The very poor writers, the *sots et les demi-sots*¹ he would rather neglect completely than merely condemn.

In view of the fact that Sainte-Beuve was thus interested primarily in the man as a manifestation of his times, it is only natural that as large a proportion as three-fourths of the essays should be taken up with memoirs, letters, and biographies. But while his large concern was with these he did not neglect the consideration of pure literature; indeed, he always felt that he was primarily a literary critic.² Memoirs, history, letters, novels, dramas, "éloquence" he revels in, but rarely poetry.

Je cause rarement ici de poésie, précisément parceque je l'ai beaucoup aimée et que je l'aime encore plus que toute chose; je craindrais d'en mal parler, ou du moins de n'avoir pas à en bien parler, à en dire assez de bien.³

To be sure the attraction of poetry is too great and its place in society too important to warrant his neglecting it altogether, nor indeed would his personal taste permit that extreme. "De ce que j'ai beaucoup aimé autrefois la poésie; de ce que je l'ai aimée comme on doit l'aimer quand on s'en mêle, c'est-à-dire trop, ce n'est pas une raison aujourd'hui pour n'en plus parler jamais."⁴

So with characteristic inclusiveness of view Sainte-Beuve explains that while feeling himself first of all a literary critic, his duty to society demands that he treat all manner of non-literary subjects. Taking up for study Guizot's *Discours sur la révolution* he defends his choice thus:

Si je venais à passer sous silence ce *Discours* pour parler ... d'un roman ancien ou nouveau, on aurait droit de penser que la critique littéraire se récusé, qu'elle se reconnaît jusqu'à un certain point frivole, qu'il est des sujets qu'elle s'interdit comme trop imposants ou trop épineux pour elle; et ce n'est jamais

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, VIII, 122.

² "Si le *Discours* de M. Guizot était purement politique, je le laisserais passer sans le croire de mon ressort, fidèle et à mon rôle, à mon goût qui sont d'accord pour s'en tenir à la littérature" (*Causeries du lundi*, I, 311). This is again one of those strange contradictions in Sainte-Beuve which are so frequent. He always left a loophole for himself, continually forestalling his critics by making room *pour un certain contraire*; in this case, too, he even contradicts himself, saying elsewhere that we must not confine ourselves to pure literature (*Nouveaux lundis*, VI, 138).

³ *Causeries du lundi*, IV, 51.

⁴ *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 247.

ainsi que j'ai compris cette critique, légère sans doute, et agréable tant qu'elle le peut, mais ferme et sérieuse quand il le faut et autant qu'il le faut.¹

When opportunity presented itself he must as a journalist and a public servant ask himself on the very threshold of his preparation to write, whether or not the time was ripe for a discussion of this particular subject. For instance, we have all loved Béranger, he says, but "le temps n'est-il pas venu de dégager un peu toutes ... ces complaisances, de payer à l'homme, à l'honnête homme qui a, comme tous, plus ou moins, ses faibles et ses faiblesses ... de lui payer une part," etc.² On the other hand Mme Sand is still alive and active and "le moment, pour la critique, d'embrasser ce puissant talent dans son cours, et de le pénétrer dans sa nature, n'est pas venu, selon moi."³

Also of Balzac:

Une véritable étude sur le romancier célèbre qui vient d'être enlevé, et dont la perte soudaine a excité l'intérêt universel, serait tout un ouvrage à écrire, et le moment, je le crois, n'en est pas venu. Ces sortes d'autopsies morales ne se font pas sur une tombe récente,⁴ surtout quand celui qui y est entré était plein de force, de fécondité, d'avenir, et semblait encore si plein d'œuvres et de jours.⁵

One has to be equally careful not to be *prématuré*⁶ nor *atardé*, but must seize, for the study of his author, the psychological moment; in the case of writers no longer living as well as of those still alive, a moment sufficiently removed from the time of his death to give a proper perspective, yet not so far removed as to embarrass the gathering of contemporary opinion and evidence. There are, to be sure, certain classic authors who are to Sainte-Beuve always *de l'ordre du jour*, for example⁷ Montaigne and others of the galaxy of fixed stars in the French firmament.

Sainte-Beuve often found it difficult to speak with complete honesty and fulness because he so often discovered that his judgment was at

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 312. Contrast, however, this *boutade*: "Le traité de la *Résignation* [of St. Augustine] d'ailleurs, échappe à la critique proprement dite; il est entremêlé de prières, et dès que la prière commence, la critique littéraire expire" (*Nouveaux lundis*, I, 251).

² *Causeries du lundi*, II, 286.

³ *Ibid.*, I, 369.

⁴ Another contradiction! This is true only of the great who will not be forgotten anyway. The small need this notice. He says of M. de Latouche: "Il est de ceux dont il convient de parler à l'heure où ils disparaissent, car il est compliqué, difficile à comprendre, et la postérité n'a le temps de se souvenir que de ce qui se détache avec unité et netteté" (*ibid.*, III, 474).

⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 443.

⁶ *Nouveaux lundis*, I, 64.

⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 156.

variance with accepted opinion. In such cases it required courage and tact for a journalist to speak his mind without apparent impertinence and with any hope of a sympathetic hearing, especially in those cases in which a sort of cult had grown up about a popular idol. For instance, when he comes to discuss Montesquieu he says that he has written much about the eighteenth century without so far any elaborate treatment of him because "il est un de ces hommes qu'on n'aborde qu'avec crainte, à cause du respect réel qu'ils inspirent et de l'espèce de religion qui s'est faite autour d'eux."¹ Lacordaire is equally difficult to treat, for he too had inspired unquestioning enthusiasm in the youth of his generation.

La critique littéraire, avec ses respects et ses réserves, s'arrête étonnée devant de tels élans enthousiastes; elle y regarde à deux fois avant de les contrarier. On hésite quand on marche seul, ... et qu'on n'a pour soi que le groupe si disséminé des gens sensés, qui ne se connaissent pas entre eux, à venir admirer trop faiblement le chef d'une milice blanche éblouissante," etc.²

But when there is need the critic must overcome his reluctance, face the possible disapproval, and speak, "il faut absolument que le grain de sel sorte, si grain de sel il y a."³

Sainte-Beuve feels that a similar courage and sense of duty must inspire the critic who enters a new field. "On hésite toujours à se mettre en avant quand l'opinion de la foule ne nous a pas frayé le chemin; il faut même, pour cela, une espèce particulière de courage, ce que j'appelle le courage du jugement."⁴ Grimm he praises for his courage in attacking new subjects.

Un excellent critique ... et venant le premier dans ses jugements; n'oublions pas cette dernière condition. Quand la réputation des auteurs est établie, il est aisé d'en parler convenablement ... mais à leurs débuts, ... et à mesure qu'ils se développent, les juger avec tact, ... prédire leur essor ou deviner leurs limites, ... c'est là le propre du critique né pour l'être."⁵

And it is precisely that which is the hardest task of the critic. But he is less than the well-equipped critic until he acquires the courage of his convictions and feels himself well enough established to do the unpopular thing,

il semble qu'il faille que tout talent, tout génie nouveau entre ainsi dans les sujets l'épée à la main, comme Renaud dans la forêt enchantée, et qu'il doive frapper hardiment jusqu'à ce qu'il ait rompu le charme; la conquête du vrai et du beau est à ce prix.⁶

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, VII, 41.

² *Nouveaux lundis*, IV, 393.

³ *Ibid.* The grain of sel, the candid opinion of the critic.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, X, 476.

⁵ *Ibid.*, VII, 287.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

When the critic has made choice of his subject, and when, if he has chosen a new or an unpopular task, he has screwed his courage to the sticking-place, he is ready to prepare himself to give a judgment. Preparation consists in steeping himself in his subject and in its connections, gathering all manner of facts concerning his man, personality, history, environment, and reputation. This acquisitive process has naturally received much attention in another section of this dissertation,¹ to which the following important caution may be added:

Vous qui êtes appelé à écrire sur l'art, rappelez-vous bien ceci: La vie humaine, la vie sociale a existé sous toutes sortes de formes ... quand elle s'est évanouie, rien n'est si difficile que de la ressaisir.²

Sainte-Beuve would emphasize the importance of collecting the facts about a man's reputation and of studying what has been said about him, particularly when the subject is the critic's contemporary:

La vraie critique à Paris se fait en causant; c'est en allant au scrutin de toutes les opinions, et en dépouillant ce scrutin avec intelligence, que le critique composerait son résultat le plus complet et le plus juste.³

His desire for a solid foundation for authoritative opinions led him to place tremendous emphasis on the scholarly, eruditional, investigating aspect of the critic's task. But he was never long without reminding us that this process is only a necessary preliminary to the final task:

Tout en profitant de notre mieux des instruments, un peu onéreux parfois, de la critique nouvelle [that is, scientific and historical criticism], nous retiendrons quelques-unes des habitudes ... de l'ancienne critique, accordant la première place dans notre admiration et notre estime à l'invention.⁴

He takes pride in having availed himself of the results of other scholars' work: "Moi-même j'en ai largement usé en mon temps (des travaux autrui); je ne me suis fait faute de marcher avec le secours et l'appui des autres."⁵ While he declares that he was not born to be an *erudit*, one of those who have *défriché le moyen âge*, he does not scorn such scholars, nor minimize their labors; indeed, he plucks with gratitude the fruit of their endeavors. Almost paradoxically, however, Sainte-Beuve says that when the critic has assembled all this knowledge he must put it into the background so that he can attack his work with vital interest and unjaded taste. Starting into his task of criticizing he ought to "s'inquiéter avant tout des intérêts du talent."⁶

¹ See section on "Scientific Criticism."

² *Causeries du lundi*, XI, 516.

³ *Ibid.*, I, 448.

⁴ *Ibid.*, XV, 378.

⁵ *Nouveaux lundis*, V, 471.

⁶ *Ibid.*, III, 17.

The following passages throw some additional light on Sainte-Beuve's teaching as to the critic's need to saturate himself in the affairs of his author: "Ce n'est qu'en laissant s'écouler un long espace de temps que l'on arrive à connaître à fond la personne qu'on étudie."¹ "Il est plus difficile qu'on ne le croirait de saisir tout d'une venue les grands hommes en tout genre: il faut du temps et passer par plus d'un degré pour arriver à les embrasser dans leur ensemble."² As regards his own case, "pour comprendre un homme et pour le peindre j'ai besoin de m'y reprendre jusqu'à deux et trois fois, qu'importe, me permettrai-je de dire ainsi, pourvu que j'arrive au but, qui est la vérité."³

One among the first steps in the critical process is to free one's mind from preconceptions arising from the domination of fixed ideas. One should judge afresh in each case.

Il y aurait un article facile à faire sur ces mémoires de Catherine (de Russie), et c'est celui que je ne ferai pas. Il n'y aurait pour cela qu'à partir de quelques principes généraux et convenus, à se montrer rigide et inexorable pour tout ce qui s'écarte de nos mœurs, de notre état de société ... on arriverait ainsi à un effet certain et à une unité de conclusion qui séduit et satisfait toujours à première vue les lecteurs superficiels et les esprits tout d'une pièce. Mais la nature humaine est moins simple⁴

and refuses to be shaped in the mold of a fixed idea.⁵

Le devoir de la critique dans tout sujet est avant tout de l'envisager sans parti pris, de se tenir exempt de préventions, fussent-elles des mieux fondées, et de ne pas sacrifier davantage à celles de ses lecteurs."⁶

The fundamental shortcoming of Nisard's *Histoire de la littérature française* is that it is written with a preconceived notion of the French spirit, and upon this Procrustean bed the historian forces every author he handles.⁷ The fact that Michelet writes history to prove or exemplify an idea locates him at the opposite critical pole from Sainte-Beuve himself.⁸ The most prevalent of fixed ideas are those that concern morality and those that determine the social conventions; all these Sainte-Beuve

¹ *Cahiers*, p. 145.

³ *Cahiers*, p. 145.

² *Nouveaux lundis*, X, 23.

⁴ *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 179.

⁵ "L'inconvénient du système de La Rochefoucauld est de donner pour tous les ordres d'action une explication uniforme et jusqu'à un certain point abstraite, quand la nature, au contraire, a multiplié les instincts, les goûts, les talents divers, et qu'elle a coloré en mille sens cette poursuite entrecroisée de tous, cette course impétueuse et savante de chacun vers l'objet de son désir" (*Causeries du lundi*, XI, 411).

⁶ *Nouveaux lundis*, XII, 31.

⁷ *Causeries du lundi*, XV, 211.

⁸ *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 112.

would abrogate when they are merely traditional or artificial; one must speak "sans aucune gêne, sans aucune de ces fausses réserves qu'imposent les ... respects humains hypocrites."¹

The rigid and unimaginative adherence to principle passes into a slavish observance of rules and precepts, a state of things which Sainte-Beuve saw in the neo-classicists who blindly and uncreatively followed tradition. To him the greatest disaster that could befall the mind was stagnation, the encysting of one's self in the shell of fixed principles whether of morality or of art, where one reaches the mere negation of progress, impedes the flux, and becomes automatically incapable of comprehending life or its manifestation in art. The remedy is, of course, to keep moving, to keep an open and hospitable mind, to subject to constant re-examination inherited and early acquired ideas; as Matthew Arnold would say, to allow a stream of fresh ideas to play freely over one's stock notions. The most conspicuous danger of the fixed idea is that it offers an invitation, difficult to resist, to falsify life. "Leroux m'a fait comprendre qu'il y a chez les systématiques convaincus une heure mauvaise où le charlatanisme se glisse aisément, et où, si l'on n'y prend pas garde, l'indifférence sur le choix des moyens commence."² To mutilate or to manipulate the truth to fit his personal view was to Sainte-Beuve a capital crime in a critic. This form of charlatanism is at its worst when the critic yields to the cheap temptation to please at all costs:

Biographe littéraire, je souffre toutes les fois que je vois des critiques éminents à tant d'égards et en possession d'un art merveilleux, ... ne songer à tirer parti des faits que pour les fausser dans le sens de l'effet passager, et de l'applaudissement. Qu'on retourne la chose comme on le voudra; dans le cas présent, il y a flagrant délit de talent, de malice et d'inexactitude.³

If in attacking his subject the critic must impose upon it no fixed ideas of his own, he must equally refuse to allow himself to be overpowered by his subject. He must follow its lead, but he must keep a clear head:

Il y a deux manières de prendre les choses et les personnages du monde et de l'histoire; ou bien de les accepter par leur surfaces, ... (ou bien) de les fouiller et de les sonder quoi qu'ils en aient; de les mettre à jour et de les démasquer impitoyablement.⁴

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, XV, 285.

² *Cahiers*, p. 50.

³ *Causeries du lundi*, VI, 453. For similar utterances on the mistake of having fixed ideas in attacking a subject, see also *ibid.*, IV, 29; VII, 229.

⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 275.

and not be imposed upon by any external decorum, any surface appearance, whether of a man or an epoch. However kindly the critic may be, he should not allow his generosity to accept any man at his own valuation without examination and confirmation:

Il y a deux manières d'aborder Carrel: ... Il y a une manière plus poétique, plus généreuse peut-être, plus magnifique, qui consisterait à voiler les défauts à faire ressortir les belles et grandes qualités ... mais il y a un autre point de vue ... qui permet de voir les défauts, d'entrevoir les motifs, de noter les altérations, et qui, sans rien violer du respect qu'on doit à une noble mémoire, restitue à l'observation morale tous ses droits.¹

He returns many times to this idea, the refusal to take a man at his own valuation; he enjoys the thought of destroying an egotistic author's heroic pose, of revealing him as merely human:

Je crois ... que quand on le peut, et quand le modèle a posé suffisamment devant vous, il faut faire les portraits les plus ressemblants possible, les plus étudiés et les plus réellement vivants, y mettre les verrues, les signes au visage, tout ce qui caractérise une physionomie au naturel, et faire partout sentir le nu et les chairs sous les draperies, sous le pli même et le faste du manteau ... Je crois que la vie y gagne et que la grandeur vraie n'y périt pas.²

A critic who possesses this ability is of the true critical lineage: "honnête, scrupuleuse, impartiale, née de Bayle."³

Impartiality, indeed, is an indispensable virtue of the critic. Writing of Pontmartin, he says:

Mon désir serait de le faire dans un parfait esprit d'impartialité: car ... cette neutralité même que M. de Pontmartin m'a si souvent reprochée, devient, je l'avoue, un de mes derniers plaisirs intellectuels. ... Ne rien dire sur les écrivains même qui nous sont opposés, rien que leurs amis judicieux ne pensent déjà et ne soient forcés d'avouer et d'admettre, ce serait mon ambition dernière.⁴

He felt keenly that the critic ought never to allow his personal dislike to bias his opinion, as did Taine in his presentation of Pope: "J'aimerais en littérature à proportionner toujours notre méthode à notre sujet et à entourer de soins tout particuliers celui qui les appelle et qui les mérite."⁵ He himself endeavors in studying Flaubert's *Salammbô* to "oublier notre liaison avec l'auteur, notre amitié même pour lui" and to do his subject justice purely on its merits.⁶

¹ *Ibid.*, VI, 84.

⁴ *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 1.

² *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, VIII, 106.

³ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 379.

⁶ *Ibid.*, IV, 31.

So far these are preliminary and partly negative operations. Having chosen his subject, having investigated it in all those relations that promise light, having freed his mind from fixed ideas, having laid aside as far as possible prejudice favorable or unfavorable, having forgotten friendship and enmities alike, the critic comes to a more positive activity.

As the opening maneuver of his direct attack he desired to set up the actual boundaries of his theme, to determine with approximate definitions the delimitations of his field. Life is so complex, so infinitely detailed, a man can be regarded under so many different aspects, that it becomes necessary to define and limit one's task "et d'abord je tracerais un cercle autour de mon sujet, et je dirai à ma pensée et à ma plume: *Tu n'iras pas plus loin.*"¹ One must have the resolution and the self-denial necessary for sifting out irrelevant material, no matter how interesting, and for shutting his eyes to the large mass of extraneous knowledge. The critic's essay should be homogeneous and unified, of one inspiration, contemplating his man or book under one consistent aspect. If he is not able to make such an essay, either because he lacks the necessary logic or because his subject demands discursive treatment, he should make divisions and give a series of studies. "Au point où je suis arrivé dans la carrière scientifique et littéraire de M. Littré, je suis obligé de prendre un parti et de diviser l'homme, sans quoi je ne pourrais le suivre de front dans tous les ordres de travaux."² Bossuet also he treats in a series of studies, regarding him successively and separately as historian, as preacher, as letter writer, and as bishop.

He considers it more necessary so to circumscribe and divide, in the work of minor writers, because the whole of their work is not worth studying:

Il convient d'observer un certain art dans l'arrangement des réputations: les grands hommes sont faits pour être connus et étudiés tout entiers; mais, quand un homme n'a eu qu'un coin de talent, il est inutile de s'étendre sur tout ce qui n'est pas ce talent même.³

As a part of the delimiting process he would try to get at the salient characteristics of his author, and he would hope to show his faults and virtues not in absolute relief but relatively and in proportion. "Quant à moi, je pense qu'il convient, dans la biographie d'un homme, dans son portrait fidèle, de conserver aux choses l'importance relative qu'elles eurent dans sa vie et dans ses pensées."⁴

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 384. ² *Nouveaux lundis*, V, 226. ³ *Ibid.*, VII, 378.

⁴ *Ibid.*, XII, 54. He says of his treatment of d'Aubigné: "Je ne dirai aujourd'hui que ce qui me semble nécessaire pour présenter cette forte figure en son vrai jour, sans exagérer ni ses vertus, ni sa pureté, ni ses mérites, mais sans rien oublier non plus d'essentiel en ce qui le distingue" (*Causeries du lundi*, X, 313).

His hope and endeavor, whatever his subject, were to define it "par ses traits principaux et par ce qui la caractérise entre toutes. Ce caractère est le plus souvent délicat à saisir et à déterminer."¹ Such a defining of the author's salient characteristics and of the point of view from which he is to be approached, such bringing into relief of his characteristic features, is the most important thing the critic can do until the moment comes for final judgment.²

In any event, Sainte-Beuve felt that the first approach to an author should be on the side of his praiseworthy qualities rather than on the side which called for censure:

Avec tout personnage historique, il faut s'attaquer d'abord aux grands côtés; je ne sais si j'aurai le temps de marquer chez Retz toutes les faiblesses, toutes les infirmités, toutes les hontes même, et de les flétrir; mais je me reprocherais de n'avoir pas dès l'abord désigné en lui les signes manifestes de supériorité et de force, qui enlèvent l'admiration quand on l'approche, et quoi qu'on en ait.³

This approach to a man on the side of his excellence is, moreover, a question of expediency, since it is most difficult to secure and maintain a truly critical poise when one studies the faults first:

Une des choses auxquelles il est le plus difficile de s'accoutumer en jugeant les hommes, c'est de maintenir la part de leurs talents ou de leurs qualités, après qu'on a reconnu celle de leurs défauts ou de leurs vices.⁴

Having appreciated his good qualities we must at once recognize and admit his defects, so as to erect a complete image of the real man. Chateaubriand, for example, must suffer some diminishing of reputation, for he has been estimated much too highly. Of course a critic when he is weighing faults must be scrupulous, lest he pass beyond the bounds of reason and justice:

Ce qu'il faudra faire alors pour maintenir les justes droits de sa renommée, ce sera, en bonne critique comme en bonne guerre, d'abandonner sans difficulté toutes les parties de ce vaste domaine qui ne sont pas vraiment belles ni susceptibles d'être sérieusement défendues, et de se retrancher dans les portions tout à fait supérieures et durables.⁵

When he makes out his critical balance sheet, the student must be sure that he has really distinguished debits from credits. It is by no means an unnecessary caution to warn the critic to make sure that

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, V, 416. ² *Causeries du lundi*, II, 443. ³ *Ibid.*, V, 53.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 166. Contrast this passage from his article on Pontmartin: "Je suis forcé de commencer mon examen ... par son côté le plus faible," etc. (*Nouveaux lundis*, II, 5).

⁵ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 177.

his subject really possesses the qualities for which he is praising him. "Nous tâcherons ... donc de ne pas tout mettre à la fois sur quelques grands écrivains. Nous tâcherons, en parlant d'eux, que l'éloge porte sur la qualité principale; car il y a, même chez les grands auteurs, une qualité principale."¹ It is desirable to be cordial and enthusiastic when possible, and to admire when one can, "mais encore faut-il savoir diriger sa louange et ne pas la faire monter en fusée."²

But only discrimination gives value to enthusiasm. An author should not be commended for the delicacy of his art, where force and grandeur are his qualities. In the work of Pascal you may legitimately praise the art of *Provinciales*; but in the *Pensées* you must praise the force and moral energy. You must praise the impetuosity and fulness of Bossuet's speech, but the distinction and grace of Fénelon's. The fact that the critic sees certain fine qualities in his subject must not blind him to the presence of others, different, but also admirable. "Quand un homme s'est rendu célèbre par un talent reconnu dans un genre, on a peine à lui en reconnaître, et à lui en accorder un autre."³ To recognize Bossuet as a great preacher should not preclude the recognition of him as a historian; to applaud Victor Hugo as a poet and to realize that his truest fame rests upon his poetry should not prevent the critics from acknowledging his success as a novelist.

Then having fortified himself with the courage and authority of these rules, the critic should for the rest place himself in the hands of his author:

Respectons la volonté de l'artiste, son caprice, et après avoir exhalé notre léger murmure, laissons-nous docilement conduire où il lui plaît de nous mener. Mais sachons du moins de quels éléments il disposait à l'origine, afin d'être à même de juger ce qu'il en a fait et ce qu'il y a ajouté de son propre fonds.⁴

Paradoxical as it may seem in view of Sainte-Beuve's principle for measuring work by the great classical standards, and his fondness for assigning a man his "place" either implicitly or explicitly, the foregoing passage might fairly be taken as a summary of his critical ideal. Gather all possible knowledge about your author, eliminate the trivial and irrelevant, eradicate your own prejudices and eccentricities, isolate his significant or characteristic quality or service, and, for the rest, follow his lead, take him as he is, let him speak for himself. In several important passages Sainte-Beuve seems to say that, having accepted an author

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, XV, 380. Compare this with his doctrine of the *faculté maîtresse*.

² *Ibid.*, p. 380.

³ *Cahiers*, p. 172.

⁴ *Nouveaux lundis*, IV, 35.

for discussion, the critic is at his mercy; that just in so far as the critic is a scientist he is at the mercy of his facts, which he must not alter or manipulate—he is in fact a *simple rapporteur*¹ of what he finds. We must, of course, bear in mind that this is with Sainte-Beuve a formal theory, a logically constructed ideal:

Je suis critique, et, en avançant dans la vie, j'ai le malheur de sentir que je m'attache de plus en plus au vrai en lui même, et que je n'entre plus dans le jeu ... en prenant la plume, je tâche de rendre compte hautement de ce qui est, de manière que même les mécontents ne puissent me contredire.²

And here follows an uncompromising statement of this idea: "Il en est de l'analyse critique comme de l'analyse chimique: on est exacte ou on ne l'est pas."³ And again,

Un critique pur est entièrement à la merci de son examen, du moment qu'il y a apporté toutes les conditions d'exactitude et toutes les précautions nécessaires; il trouve ce qu'il trouve, et il le dit tout net; le chimiste nous montre le résultat de son expérience, il n'y peut rien changer.⁴

The truly scrupulous critic feels that he is honest only when he has told the whole truth. Sainte-Beuve censures La Bruyère for that form of dishonesty:

Ce *Portrait de Fontenelle* par La Bruyère est pour nous une grande leçon; il nous montre comment un peintre habile, un critique pénétrant, peut se tromper en disant vrai, mais en ne disant pas tout, et en ne devinant pas assez que, dans cette bizarre et complexe organisation humaine, un défaut, un travers et un ridicule des plus caractérisés n'est jamais incompatible avec une qualité supérieure."⁵

Sainte-Beuve's doctrine of the *qualité maîtresse* is central in his critical theory and has been discussed in another place. But important as he held it to isolate this master-quality, he would not have it eclipse for the critic other less dominant qualities. "Je crains toujours dans ces portraits de pousser à la caricature, ce qui pour quelques-uns des personnages serait facile, mais ce qui est plein d'inconvénients et ce qui dérange pour le lecteur la vraie proportion des choses."⁶

These last few passages serve to reinforce and to restate much of the matter presented in the previous study of the function of criticism and of Sainte-Beuve as a scientific critic. Indeed we may say that he is stating the same truth, this time, however, from the point of view of practical procedure rather than as an ideal result, or a theoretical method.

¹ *Ibid.*, VI, 5.

² *Causeries du lundi*, VIII, 292.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, I, 265.

⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 409.

⁵ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 322.

⁶ *Ibid.*, VIII, 439.

Sainte-Beuve complains of those critics and biographers who distort the perspective of their subject, or, to borrow a figure from still another art, transpose their theme into a wrong key. "La première loi d'un portrait est de ne pas le faire dans un ton opposé à celui du modèle."¹ "Je me suis dit souvent que les portraits devaient être faits selon le ton et l'esprit du modèle,"² so that one should not treat Victor Hugo in a classical spirit, nor André Chénier in a tone of romanticism; a portrait of De Vigny should be "bien simple et tout idéal."³ Speaking of Beaumarchais he says that "il faut se garder d'être systématique, car lui même il ne l'était pas."⁴ Sainte-Beuve was himself peculiarly gifted in the matter of catching and preserving the tone of his model. He knew and valued highly the service of the wisely chosen quotation, of letting his man speak for himself at the significant and crucial points: "Je ne me pardonnerais point d'avoir parlé si longuement de Buffon sans en rien citer, et le lecteur aurait droit de m'en vouloir."⁵ "Je voudrais, selon mon habitude, donner quelque idée, par une citation, du genre d'esprit et de finesse de cet excellent conteur," etc.⁶ "Il y a un charmant passage que je veux pourtant citer, car je suis de ceux qui citent, et qui ne sont contents que quand ils ont découpé dans un auteur un bon morceau, un joli échantillon."⁷ It is partly this method of skilful analysis, accompanied by copious quotation, that constitutes what we may call Sainte-Beuve's virtuosity in keeping the "tone" of his model. But he is impelled to sound a warning against the misuse of this device, citing Montesquieu as a horrible example:

Il arrive souvent qu'il cite inexactement et pour l'effet, comme Chateaubriand le fera plus tard; cela arrive aux hommes d'imagination qui se servent de l'érudition sans pouvoir s'y assujettir ni la maîtriser. On prend, en lisant, une note avec esprit, avec saillie; et ensuite, en composant, on se donne une peine infinie pour faire passer sa route royale par l'endroit de la note illustre ou même quelquefois de l'historiette légère.⁸

And one is tempted to inquire how often even Sainte-Beuve permitted himself to make a wide critical détour for the sake of introducing some

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, VI, 82.

² *Ibid.*, p. 398. "Mignet commet de légères inexactitudes ou des fautes de nuances dans les couleurs qu'il emploie" (*Causeries du lundi*, VIII, 302). "Je voudrai ne forcer en rien les tons" (*ibid.*, IV, 29). He criticizes M. Walckenaer severely for his *infidélité de ton* in criticism (*ibid.*, VI, 171).

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, VI, 398.

⁶ *Nouveaux lundis*, XI, 11.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, VI, 201.

⁷ *Causeries du lundi*, XV, 215.

⁵ *Ibid.*, X, 72.

⁸ *Ibid.*, VII, 75.

particularly spicy bit. The advantages of the practice of quoting, however, far outweigh the dangers and mistakes such as he points out.

If we could hope to sum up a matter necessarily so disjointed and heterogeneous, the following passage of Sainte-Beuve's own would serve as such a summary of his *Precepts et Procédés*:

L'esprit dans lequel le livre est conçu est un bon esprit; j'appelle ainsi celui qui consiste à ne pas arriver sur le sujet avec une prévention et un système, à se pénétrer de l'esprit même de l'époque qui est en cause, à recueillir tous les témoignages, à s'éclairer de toutes les dépositions, et à nous rendre avec gravité, avec bon sens et modération, le résultat de cette enquête si délicate et si compliquée.¹

A study of Sainte-Beuve's critical vocabulary opens up to view a most profitable and tempting field. A lexicon of the important critical terms he most frequently uses, together with sufficient quotation to illuminate them from their contexts—such terms as reality, beauty, harmony, tone, *vrai*, *vérité*, *vraisemblance*, *netteté*, and others—would clarify and render stable words whose exact content or connotation in many passages is vague and inconstant. It would throw valuable light on both the logic and the art of his critical processes. But so long and important a piece of work could not be undertaken within the scope of this dissertation. Three of his terms, however, demand consideration: the differentiations he made when he adopted and defined the terms "Attic," "Asiatic," and "urbane" are so central in his thinking and so operative in his work that we cannot in justice neglect to present them here. The discussion finds its best beginning in this statement: "Le genre attique est surtout l'opposé de l'asiatique, l'urbanité est surtout le contraire de la rusticité."² The mingling of Atticism, the Hellenic quality of beauty and harmony, with urbanity, the Roman quality of common sense and moderation, produces the characteristic and ideal French quality:

Mais l'atticisme, mais l'urbanité, mais le principe de sens et de raison qui s'y mêle à la grâce, ne nous en séparons pas. Le sentiment d'un certain beau conforme à notre race, à notre éducation, à notre civilisation, voilà ce dont il ne faut jamais se départir.³

It is "Atticism" that he commends in Pascal so often and so highly; he praises it in Hamilton, calling him "un des écrivains les plus attiques

¹ *Ibid.*, XV, 339. ² *Cahiers*, p. 172; cf. also *Causeries du lundi*, XV, 404.

³ *Ibid.*, XV, 362. He gives a short history of "Atticism" in France, *ibid.*, XII, 481.

de notre littérature."¹ In Greek, Lysias and Xenophon are for excellence the exponents of the "Attic" style; "en français Mme de Caylus, Mme de La Fayette sont des modèles d'atticisme."² "L'atticisme, chez un peuple, et au moment heureux de sa littérature, est une qualité légère qui ne tient pas moins à ceux qui la sentent qu'à celui qui écrit."³ In the following passage he again indicates the component elements of the tradition he loved:

Terence est le lien entre l'urbanité romaine et l'atticisme des Grecs. Qui dit *urbanité*, dit politesse, élégance, un bon goût dans le badinage, de l'enjouement plus qu'un rire ouvert et déployé. Qui dit *attiques* à proprement parler, entend des écrivains nus, sobres, chastes de diction (comme Lysias ou Xénophon) qui n'appuient pas, ... qui ne scintillent pas. Ils rappellent et réfléchissent dans leurs écrits cette plaine de l'Attique, d'une maigreur élégante et fine, d'un ciel transparent. Quels sont les écrivains attiques en français dont nous puissions comparer sans trop de contresens la diction à celle de Térence? Il en est très-peu. Mme de Lafayette, Fénelon, Mme de Caylus, en sont certainement; Le Sage aussi pour *Gil Blas*, et Abbé Prévost pour *Manon Lescaut*. Au XVIII^{me} siècle, la race des attiques se perd; Voltaire est, quand il le veut, le modèle de l'urbanité; mais l'atticisme léger ... cette esquisse simplicité n'a plus sa place.⁴

It was the writers who were not indigenous—Rousseau, Bernardin de Sainte-Pierre, and later Chateaubriand—who chiefly contributed to the eclipse of Atticism in France.⁵ "L'atticisme est proprement l'opposé du genre asiatique trop surchargé d'ornements."⁶ Asiaticism is the new, superabundant, flamboyant, over-decorated style which he finds in Rousseau, in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, in Chateaubriand, the style of Lamartine in the *Girondins* which Sainte-Beuve specifically

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 95.

² *Ibid.*, XI, 520.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 521. He speaks of Thiers as being really French in so far as his style is Attic (*ibid.*, XV, 89). He speaks of the "Atticism" of Maucroix (*ibid.*, X, 232). "Atticism" is a term which is much abused by critics who are likely to misapply it (*ibid.*, XI, 520). He defines it thus elsewhere: "L'atticisme, c'est à dire le pur langage naturel français, reposé, coulant de source, et jaillissant des lèvres avant toute coloration factice," etc. (*ibid.*, XII, 485), and he laments the fact that in his own day this great quality was dying out.

⁴ *Nouveaux lundis*, V, 366. He gives a history of the word *urbanité* and adds some items later (*ibid.*, VI, 375). Fléchier among others "a éminemment l'urbanité qui est le contraire de la rusticité" (*Causeries du lundi*, XV, 405).

⁵ Pascal is the "moins asiatique des écrivains" and the one whom we must read as an antidote to this Asiatic style which Rousseau and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre introduced (*Causeries du lundi*, VI, 441).

⁶ *Ibid.*, XV, 404.

calls "la manière, abondante, excessive asiatique."¹ It is the style of Balzac, the atmosphere from which the later Sainte-Beuve withdrew to ever remoter distance. And it is the Attic which he increasingly identified as the truly and characteristically French style.²

We know that Sainte-Beuve was interested in a book as a definite and detachable entity, that his humanistic instincts were quite as strong and as operative as his naturalistic convictions, and that they flowered in his mind in an intense interest in the aesthetic side of the arts. He himself, as we have seen, constantly recurred to the statement that criticism must always remain an art, and must therefore, in his logic, always stay in the humanistic tradition.

This is the place then to state very briefly his ideas on literature—its purpose, function, and forms, including both *genres* and style. Harper makes a somewhat ill-balanced statement as to Sainte-Beuve when he says: "He had comparatively little to say about literature as an art, about its forms and laws and its evolution; literature was in his eyes an infinitely diverse expression of personality, and personality was the substance of which literature was the shadow."³ This statement would be acceptable if we may qualify the implication that he was not interested in literature on the side of form. As a matter of fact we frequently find Sainte-Beuve basing his main judgment of a work on the tradition of literary form, or of literary style created and dictated by good usage.

As aesthetician he was very catholic and inclusive in his classification—he seemed willing to rank as literature practically any written expression of thought or feeling. He was still more catholic as a critic, handling with equally scrupulous care all books that interested him. Science, art, poetry, history, travel, eloquence, criticism—all were grist to his critical mill. If he attempted to limit more narrowly the bounds of literature it was in these two directions: literature is an *expression de soi*, and its invariable aim and function are to give aesthetic pleasure. Here, as we have seen him do in other matters, Sainte-Beuve shows some confusion of thought, heralding the deep uncertainty of our own day concerning the definitions of *genre* and forms. In the actual critical essays he seemed to regard as literary anything that was written, yet in his theorizing he had a rather definite formula for literature:

Revenons aux choses simplement agréables et indifférentes, à ce qui est du ressort de la pure littérature. L'esprit littéraire, dans sa vivacité et sa grâce, consiste à savoir s'intéresser à ce qui plaît dans une délicate lecture, à ce qui

¹ *Ibid.*, II, 449.

² *Ibid.*, VI, 441.

³ Harper, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

est d'ailleurs inutile en soi et qui ne sert à rien dans le sens vulgaire; à ce qui ne passionne pas pour un but prochain et positif; à ce qui n'est que l'ornement, la fleur, la superfluité immortelle et légère de la société et de la vie.¹

As soon, he says, as one attempts to force literature to serve some utilitarian end, "c'est couper les ailes à la fantaisie et au grand art que ne relève que de lui-même."²

Literature, though as an art it has no avowed purpose and no aim other than artistic pleasure, does nevertheless produce a result, the cultivation of the spirit; "voyez-vous, la plus grande gloire des poètes morts ou absents consiste en ce que les vivants heureux et présents les lisent pour en faire un accompagnement et un prétexte à leurs pensées: le piano au fond pendant lequel on cause."³ And this is not entirely inconsistent with the fact that he feels that the function of a whole school or type of poetry is that of a *promenade buissonnière* on a spring morning; for the experiencing of ideal pleasures, of genuinely artistic satisfaction, is in itself an elevation of the spirit and a refinement of the sensibilities. "Ne pas avoir le sentiment des lettres, cela veut dire ne pas avoir le sentiment de la vertu, de la gloire, de la grâce, de la beauté, en un mot de tout ce qu'il y a de véritablement divin sur le terre."⁴ Must we not necessarily infer that if the lack of appreciation of literature so dwarfs one's spirit, the possession of that *sentiment des lettres* forwards one in the acquisition of the desirable virtues enumerated? The service of literature in the life of a nation, too, he profoundly believes in.⁵ His faith in the social and spiritual services of literary criticism we have studied elsewhere in some detail; and Sainte-Beuve in many passages cordially classifies criticism as a type of literature—this though he may shift his focus, and change his atmosphere in other passages and look coldly upon criticism as a type of philosophy or as some kind of purely technical writing.

His protests, as we have shown elsewhere,⁶ against "tendency" in literature are not directed against the ideal and spiritual meaning that underlies all art, but against the purely utilitarian in art. Polemic is peculiarly dangerous, he thinks, essentially treacherous. The doctrinaire artist will inevitably, in the excess of his zeal, under pressure of

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, VI, 24.

² *Ibid.*, I, 205.

³ *Cahiers*, p. 10.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 188. He describes the salutary moral and psychological effects of love for Molière in almost extravagant terms: "C'est avoir en soi une garantie contre bien des défauts, bien des travers et des vices d'esprit," while Corneille, Racine, and Boileau each has his special medicinal virtue (*Nouveaux lundis*, V, 277 ff.).

⁵ *Causeries du lundi*, VII, 323.

⁶ Cf. *supra*, pp. 64 ff.

his conviction, allow falsehood to creep in—the serpent which leaves as his slimy trail charlatanism and quackery, which, says Sainte-Beuve, contaminate all orders of thought: "Oui, mais dans l'ordre de la pensée, dans l'art, c'est la gloire et l'éternel honneur que le charlatanisme n'y pénètre pas, c'est ce qui fait l'inviolabilité de cette noble partie de l'homme."¹

It is rather surprising that he had little to say about the *genres* of literature as *genres*, and the little he did say is astonishingly unimportant. It is probable that his early experience as a romanticist had convinced him of the artificiality and unreality of the laws of *genre* as codified by the formalists of his day. He who had forwarded and shared the revolt against the pseudo-classics, who had been a co-worker with Hugo, De Musset, and Gautier, was not himself to be caught in the machinery of the old complex distinctions. And we have to remind ourselves that the modern critical psychology of species in literature had not appeared.

He has more and more definite things to say about the *roman* than about any of the other *genres*.² He has scattered utterances on various kinds of prose and on the forms and types of lyric verse, but none of them are of the highest importance, and there are not enough of them to enable us to establish a body of definitions or discriminations.³ As Faguet has pointed out,⁴ it is astonishing that Sainte-Beuve should have taken so little interest in a critical way in the drama. Sainte-Beuve himself asserts that the French genius is essentially dramatic, and there seems to have been in his nature something un-Gallic that

¹ *Cahiers*, p. 51.

² "Je me garderai bien, pour commencer, de donner ni même d'avoir par-devers moi une théorie du roman. Le grand avantage du roman est précisément d'avoir échappé jusqu'ici à toute théorie. ... Grâce à cette liberté d'allure qu'il a eue à toutes les époques, et qu'on lui a concédée en tant que genre sans conséquence, le roman a prospéré, fleuri, fructifié, et il s'est vu capable, presque dès sa naissance, de prendre toutes les formes, sentimentale, pastorale, poétique, chevaleresque, historique, ironique, satirique, allégorique, descriptive, morale, passionnée. La forme philosophique et raisonneuse est aussi l'une des siennes, et je ne saurais la proscrire. *La nouvelle Héloïse* et *Delphine* sont des branches légitimes du roman. Un peu de prêcherie n'y messied pas, c'est accordé: il ne s'agit que d'y observer le goût, la vraisemblance, la raison, d'y entretenir l'intérêt, de n'y pas introduire l'ennui. En un mot j'admets tous les genres en fait de roman, et je ne m'inquiète que de la manière dont ils sont traités" (*Nouveaux lundis*, V, 25).

³ On *Mémoires* cf. *Causeries du lundi*, I, 443, 446; XV, 47. On *Lettres*, *ibid.*, VIII, 110. On the *Epigramme* cf. *Nouveaux lundis*, VII, 8. On the forms of lyric poetry cf. the articles on poetic subjects.

⁴ Faguet, *Sainte-Beuve, critique dramatique*, p. 69.

would account for his indifference to the drama. The only considerable passage of dramatic criticism in this his later period is the series of essays on *Le Cid* of Corneille; and even here he is more concerned with the play as a manifestation of the spirit of its times and as a document in literary history than as a play. There occurs, however, some little discussion of essential principles of dramatic form, in particular of the unities.¹

Sainte-Beuve was truly the French critic in his paramount interest in matters of style, and his discussions of purely literary technique are mainly devoted to it. Many of his judgments of men and books take style as their sole basis. His own style was eminently plastic and adaptable, and in this respect meets the requirement he set up for a good style for the critic, which, he said, should vary with the necessities of his work, taking on atmosphere and tone from the material he is handling. So Sainte-Beuve's own sensitive style becomes ancient when handling ancient matter; imaginative and metaphorical when the themes are poetry; classic or Romantic, realistic or idealistic, austere or full of the joy of life by turns; his sense of style, his "taste" was so keen as to enable him to detect and to assume at will the peculiar flavor of an author.² The appreciation of a fine style is, he says, peculiarly a French endowment, as is also what may be called a national pride in excellent writing.³

In Volume I of the *Causeries du lundi* he gives a brief history of French style, asserting that the great classical period was the epoch *par excellence* of fine writing, setting the standard by which we must always measure ourselves. Even the uneducated *dames de cour* of that brilliant age could write beautifully, because they possessed the two essential qualities of French style, simplicity and *netteté*. It was Rousseau and the romanticists following him who introduced into their work eloquence and declamation, marring its purity, destroying its certainty.⁴ Sainte-Beuve felt that in his own day the art of writing was languishing, if not perishing; "il y a dans l'ouvrage de Barthélemy une qualité à laquelle on est trop peu sensible à présent, il y a de la composition et de la liaison."⁵ Written style, he says, is nowadays giving place to spoken style, and the art of writing is dying out; in this generation anybody thinks he can

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, VII, 258, where he discusses the unities; cf. also *ibid.*, p. 285.

² *Causeries du lundi*, VIII, 210.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, VI, 393.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 92.

⁵ *Ibid.*, VII, 209.

write, and all sorts of persons are bursting into print—persons with no training who are consequently capable of nothing other than a slipshod style.¹

Sainte-Beuve is the advocate of the golden mean. He complains of a style that is merely slipshod, though he recognizes that too formal a manner leads to affectation. "Il faut écrire comme on parle, et ne pas trop parler comme on écrit,"² is his apparently paradoxical counsel. It is easier, he says, for a Frenchman to speak well than to write well; "de la parole vive au papier il s'est fait bien des naufrages."³ He says of the spoken or written style: "La parole est une faculté qui, à toutes les époques, et dans un degré éminent, est donnée naturellement à quelques-uns; c'est entre la parole *parlée* et cette même parole *écrite* que la plus grande différence a lieu, et qu'il se fait un naufrage de bien des pensées."⁴ The author's written style should partake of the liveliness and freshness of speech, while at the same time it should exhibit that harmony, organization, clearness, and *netteté* that come only from training and the taking of pains. One must have done one's rhetoric, he says of Delecluze,

cependant, il y aura, en littérature, une chose bien essentielle qu'on ne lui aura pas apprise et qu'il ne saura jamais; c'est l'art d'écrire. Il n'a jamais fait de rhétorique; on s'en aperçoit en le lisant. Ne pas avoir fait de rhétorique dans le sens où je l'entends ici, c'est ne pas se douter des difficultés de l'art.⁵

Training and experience must finally equip one for that marshaling of ideas into order which constitutes the foundation of good writing, for style after all is but the manner of presenting material:

Assembler, soutenir et mettre en jeu à la fois dans un instant donné *le plus de rapports*, agir en masse et avec concert, c'est là le difficile et le grand art, qu'on soit général d'armée, orateur ou écrivain. Il y a des généraux qui ne peuvent assembler et manœuvrer plus de dix mille hommes, et des écrivains qui ne peuvent manier qu'une ou tout au plus deux idées à la fois. ... Je connais ainsi des écrivains qui, avant d'écrire, congédient la moitié de leurs idées, et qui ne savent les exprimer qu'une à une:—c'est pauvre.⁶

Nevertheless, Sainte-Beuve, lest he should have made too strong a case for the disciplined style, warns us against mere virtuosity in writing.

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, IX, 63.

⁴ *Ibid.*, IX, 385.

² *Cahiers*, p. 121.

⁵ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 82.

³ *Causeries du lundi*, XI, 352.

⁶ *Portraits littéraires*, III, 547.

The author who has acquired a conscious facility must resist the temptation to write for the sake of writing:

Toujours le style te démange. ... Rien de plus juste; ce malheureux goût de style et d'art est comme une gale qui s'attache à vous et gâte toute votre vie. Elle vous empêche d'être politique. ... Au moment où vous commencez à l'être voilà le style qui vous démange; plus de laisser-aller, plus de joie. Il vous faut rentrer dans votre bouge, polir votre mot, trouver votre rime, vous taper le front et vous ronger les ongles.¹

When one has acquired a taste and a technique like this he must beware lest he pass from virtuosity into preciosity—in a word, Sainte-Beuve's severest word, into neo-classicism. He especially decried the artificiality of laborious elegance: "l'élégance! quand l'élégance n'atteint pas la grâce ce n'est rien du tout."² He quotes from Mme de Girardin,

qui a fait, dans *Napoléon*, un vers qui la trahit: "Ah! c'est que l'élégance est de la poésie." Certes, je ne voudrais pas exclure de la poésie l'élégance, mais quand je vois celle-ci mise en première ligne, j'ai toujours peur que la façon, la *fashion*, ne prime la nature, et que l'enveloppe n'emporte le fond.³

Sainte-Beuve's advice as to the practical way of avoiding the grievous faults of the artificial style is twofold. In the first place the writer should embody in his written style the vigor and freshness of his spoken style; in the second place he should maintain and conserve his individuality, refusing in spite of the severest discipline to become standardized. The style of Cousin, he says, admirable as it is in many ways, is lacking in this essential feature: "Rien n'y marque l'homme. ... J'aime que le style se ressente davantage des qualités originales et piquantes de l'individu, en un mot qu'il sente l'homme."⁴ Unless his style be, in the words of Buffon, "de l'homme même" the writer falls into abstraction, into formless generalities. As a pendant to this advocacy of individuality he deplores imitation. "J'aime qu'il en soit de la langue, du style de tout grand écrivain, comme du cheval de tout grand capitaine: que nul ne le monte après lui."⁵ The very truest mark of a great writer is that he achieves a style which is the indissoluble and inimitable union of his manner of thinking and his manner of writing. This is, indeed, what makes him a great writer. It is the style of Pascal that is his

¹ *Portraits contemporains*, V, 459.

² *Cahiers*, p. 59.

⁴ *Ibid.*, XI, 469.

³ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 393.

⁵ *Portraits contemporains*, V, 456.

ideal—rapid, direct, clear, brilliant, the perfect vehicle of the keen, incisive, powerful thought which it conveys.¹

Sainte-Beuve practically never fails to discuss the style of the artist whom he has under consideration—appraising, condemning, commending; and always looming large in the background, implicit or explicit, as standard and criterion, stands the style of Pascal and the other great classicists.

¹ "Je vais droit au défaut capital et radical du talent élevé de M. de Bonald. ... M. de Bonald nous fait repasser par la filière des mots et par la mécanique du langage de Condillac, ... pour revenir au monde des idées et au ciel métaphysique de M. Malebranche" (*Causeries du lundi*, IV, 435). In other words Bonald's style and manner are not his own.

VII. SAINTE-BEUVE'S PRACTICE IN CRITICISM

The program of Sainte-Beuve's criticizing, put together in a previous section of this thesis, is a synthetic one, the items collected from various places wherein he discusses his art. All its items are those that he has in one place or another definitely and strongly propounded. Most of it, as a matter of fact, he has given in the formula for criticizing in the famous Chateaubriand article.¹

But it cannot be expected that examination of the essays in order will show him following this program closely or even making use of all its details in any one essay. It is indeed safe to say that there is no essay in which he uses the whole program, and certain it is that he does not in any essay take up the processes in the beautifully logical order in which they are formulated. He does make use of them all, in this essay emphasizing one, in that essay another. He even introduces processes not provided for in the program, some of them unique, some of them too whimsical and personal to be catalogued. He must have realized that his critical program was a rationalized, logically constructed edifice rather than a procedure worked out through actual trial and error. In the actual essays he proceeded in his approaches, expositions, and judgments as an orderly scientific critic, though sometimes with methods and points of view impossible to standardize or even repeat.

Our work here is to determine from his exact statements whether or not he was conscious of a definite method of procedure and whether and to what extent he followed the logical plan we have gathered from his statement.

Two investigations are necessary before we can reach this determination: We must examine the content of the essays to determine those matters that Sainte-Beuve handles most often and emphasizes most, and we must examine the structure of all the essays for the presence and use of his critical formula. The first investigation will tell us within certain limits what kind of a critic Sainte-Beuve was in practice, scientific, historical, or aesthetic, and the second will show us whether or not, and under what conditions, he found his program workable.

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 1.

In pursuance of the former study all the essays of the *Causeries* and the *Nouveaux lundis* were examined. For this classification the following categories were used:

1. Biographical matter

- a) The events of the life of his subject
- b) Analysis and interpretation of character

2. Historical matter

- a) Political history, politics, war, diplomacy, social movements
- b) *Études de mœurs*

3. Literary matter

- a) Exposition, the expounding of his documents with the unavoidable discussion of the ideas and doctrines found in them
- b) Literary history, tracing the development of a *genre*, recurring appearance of phenomena, the characteristic evolution of an author, a strain of influence
- c) Critical judgment and evaluation, the term "critical" being here used as designating opinion and suggestion as to the merits and defects of the work he is handling
- d) Polemic matter, argument in which Sainte-Beuve is taking sides on a moot question and trying to bring the reader to his point of view
- e) Philosophic matter, including aesthetics, in which he is expounding and applying theories concerning art, history, politics, or criticism itself

It is not necessary to say that the delimitation of these categories is not scientifically exact or that the classes indicated by them are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive; there is much overlapping and interpenetration of the subject-matter. The material offered by the essays and the nature of the categories themselves preclude a hard-and-fast scientific classification; and the fact that the essays are literary precludes their being handled as mere science. But this tentative and suggestive grouping of the essays does reveal the lines of Sainte-Beuve's main interests.

In the two series there are some six hundred and forty essays. There are certain groups which form series, occasionally as many as five on the same subject, as witness the five each on Talleyrand, Mme Desbordes-Valmore, and Le Maréchal de Villars; four on Horace Vernet; and many groups of three. There are, roughly speaking, four hundred and thirty subjects treated.

The examination of these six hundred and forty essays yields the following summaries: Biographical matter predominates in one hundred and ninety, one hundred and thirty-four placing the main emphasis

of the essay on the events of the subject's life, and fifty-six placing it on character analysis and interpretation. This biographical group constitutes, as may be seen, 60 per cent of the essays, a finding that supports the statement that Sainte-Beuve gives a major place to biography.

Historical matter in the two varieties provided for receives the main emphasis in seventy-five essays. Of these thirty are concerned with political history, forty-five are studies of manners. Bald figures are, however, peculiarly deceptive in this class, since Sainte-Beuve was constantly introducing into his essays cursory and, as it were, casual historical matter of various kinds, so that the number of essays in which it holds first place understates his interest in history. We have to remind ourselves of the large number in which it holds second place and the other large number in which it is in the background of his thinking. In regard to the forty-five essays in which studies of manners occupy the foreground, we must bring to mind the fact that Sainte-Beuve was deeply and unfailingly human; he had a keen and restless curiosity about life and the behavior of human beings in all ages and places; he delighted to delve into the past, to find anecdotes, quaint usages, forgotten manners. Nothing that served to throw light or interest on the development of mankind or on the growth of the mind was trivial to him or outside his province. We find a rich record and a sympathetic study of customs, habits, humors, oddities—this is the nature of the material to be found in these *études de mœurs*. It occupies a major place in forty-five of the essays, holds second place in others, and occurs in fragments and scattered passages in many places. Such matter is, of course, extremely serviceable in placing a man in his setting, *dans son cadre*, a service which Sainte-Beuve delighted to perform and which he considered essential.¹

Literary matter occupies the main place and receives the main emphasis in one hundred and fifty of the essays. The reiteration of the previous warning seems necessary here; the mere figures are a bit misleading because whatever other kind of matter he is using Sainte-Beuve is always literary in method and style, and in many cases matter is handled by way of leading up to a literary judgment or defending such a judgment, which, though it be the very core of the essay, may occupy a small space.

The four varieties of literary matter provided for in the scheme occur in the following proportions: exposition is conspicuous in sixty essays; literary history, in thirty-five; critical discussion, in fifty-five.

¹ See "Aesthetic Criticism," p. 46.

To put it in other words, of the hundred and fifty essays in which literary matter predominates, 40 per cent is chiefly occupied with expounding and interpreting the ideas of the persons under discussion, about 20 per cent is given to problems of literary development, and 40 per cent to the expression of Sainte-Beuve's own critical views, chiefly estimating the actual work or man under discussion.

As to the remaining varieties of subject-matter, the aesthetic and the polemic, only a few essays are devoted to each. Sainte-Beuve is not much given to theorizing formally about his art. He is prevailingly empirical, content with functioning directly as a critic, saying very little about the theoretical or speculative bases of his working principles. Indeed, in view of his enormous erudition and the infinite trouble he took to prepare himself for the writing of an essay, he is curiously matter of fact and practical-minded in all his processes. He has said, as we have seen, a great deal about the art and function of the critic and criticism, but sifted down it proves to be mainly the expounding and defining of actual working principles. And even this body of critical discussion looks small in comparison with his great output of writing. Among the small number of essays—less than a dozen—in which the aesthetic or philosophical-critical matter predominates must be mentioned "De la tradition en littérature,"¹ the article on Chateaubriand,² which contains most of the items of his critical program, and the article on Deschanel's *Essai de critique naturelle*.³

So far as concerns matter of a polemic kind, only four or five of the essays can fairly be assembled under this caption. He says in a well-known passage cited elsewhere in this thesis that he has renounced polemic criticism. One must, however, recognize this element in the essays "sur l'orthographe,"⁴ "Les lectures publiques du soir,"⁵ and "La question des théâtres,"⁶ since they are distinctly framed for the purpose of convincing.

Besides the groups outlined above we must constitute an omnibus class where we may dispose of such matter as the political theorizing of "La reforme sociale en France,"⁷ the exposition of the Saint-Simonian theories of social betterment in the essay on Duveyrier.⁸

One of the deductions to be drawn from this classification confirms the common judgment given of Sainte-Beuve that he was interested

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, XV, 356.

² *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 1.

³ *Ibid.*, IX, 62.

⁴ *Ibid.*, VIII, 73.

⁵ *Ibid.*, V, 70.

⁶ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 35.

⁷ *Nouveaux lundis*, IX, 161.

⁸ *Ibid.*, X, 237.

primarily in biography, in life-history and character; in the individual rather than in the group, and in the group large or small only for the explanation it afforded of its individuals. But to this conclusion we must add a pendant not always stated by students of Sainte-Beuve: he is interested in whatever embodies and expresses the characteristic personality of writers. His was thus pre-eminently a psychological rather than a dramatic sympathy.

The only surprise that the classification might offer is the small amount of space or emphasis given in the essays to aesthetics or artistic theory. What discussion there is of these matters is largely scattered and even desultory. When all is said it is clear that Sainte-Beuve was the practical workman in criticism, and that he is fundamentally the historian of actual literature, of current human behavior, and of the minds of definite men.

The second investigation we must undertake is designed to answer the inquiry, How closely did Sainte-Beuve, in the process of criticizing, adhere to the plan, program, or series of rules that he himself laid down? To state it succinctly and colloquially, did he practice what he preached?

In making this study we will take the critical program already formulated and apply it to the essays item by item. Only those occurrences of his use of a specific doctrine which show a conscious, deliberate, and emphatic application of it will be quoted or cited; those cases in which the item receives casual and incidental attention will be passed over with only casual and general notice. For example, Sainte-Beuve rarely fails to mention the birthplace of the person whose biography he is giving. But in many cases it is a mere bit of historical routine, given without elaboration; in a few cases Sainte-Beuve believes that the place in which a man is born and passes his childhood had some definite or powerful influence on his development. It is instances of the second kind that will be quoted or cited.

The first item to be considered is that of race and racial qualities, in Sainte-Beuve's phrase "*cette racine obscure et dérobée*," sometimes very difficult to discover.¹ It is clear that by "race" he generally meant nationality, for he speaks of the English race, the French, the Italian, even the Breton "race." Indeed it is not in Sainte-Beuve but in Taine and Renan that we have our first modern scientific studies of genuine racial influence in literature.

¹ See *supra*, p. 33.

Representative illustrations of Sainte-Beuve's use of what he calls the author's race are the following: "Il me semble que tout se concilie chez Duclos, et que les inconséquences elles-mêmes s'expliquent moyennant l'humeur et la race. Il était Breton; il devait à cette origine bien caractérisée des points fixes de résistance dont il ne se départait pas."¹ Of Le Sage he says that though he met jealousies and made enemies "il tint ferme, et ne se laissa aller à aucune basse complaisance. C'est ici que le Breton se retrouve en lui."² Lamennais he calls "ce dur Breton, avec ses aspérités d'origine,"³ and then, too, he treats of the manifestation of the Breton strain in Renan: "Il appartient à la race bretonne pure, à cette race triste, douce, inflexible ... il a encore de sa race première certains traits que lui-même a notés comme les plus profonds et les plus durables, la foi, le sérieux, l'antipathie pour ce qui est vulgaire, le mépris de la légèreté."⁴ He points out the influence of English birth on Hamilton, and adds that "il ne fit que croiser ce qu'il y avait de plus fin dans les deux races"⁵ (French and English); Chesterfield, too, unites in himself these two races: "Il unit assez bien lui-même les avantages des deux nations, avec un trait pourtant qui est bien de sa race. Il avait de l'imagination jusque dans l'esprit."⁶ Ramond's father was from the south of France and his mother from the Palatinate: "Le jeune Ramond participa intellectuellement de cette double origine; il montra de bonne heure la vivacité, la promptitude brillante d'impressions qui caractérise les races du Midi, et il y mêla de la sensibilité et quelque chose de l'enthousiasme du Nord."⁷ His description of Béranger is to the point: "Mais Béranger, ne l'oublions pas, est de la race gauloise, et la race gauloise, même à ses instants les plus poétiques, manque de réserve et de chasteté: voyez Voltaire, Molière, La Fontaine, Rabelais et Villon, les aïeux."⁸ He reiterates this about La Fontaine elsewhere,⁹ and Collé he calls "le dernier des Gaulois," analyzing what he means by this.¹⁰ Mlle de Scudéry, whose father was a Gascon but had moved to Normandy and married there, partook more of her Norman than her Provençal blood.¹¹ In writing of Goethe, "le type accompli du génie allemand,"¹² he recalls to our minds several times

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, IX, 220.

² *Ibid.*, II, 359.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, I, 35.

⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 384.

⁵ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 95.

⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 243.

⁷ *Ibid.*, X, 447.

⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 292.

⁹ *Ibid.*, VII, 532.

¹⁰ *Nouveaux lundis*, VII, 370.

¹¹ *Causeries du lundi*, IV, 122.

¹² *Ibid.*, II, 341.

the fact that we are dealing with a German and must make allowances for this in our opinions; and of Goethe's friend Bettina Brentano he says that she kept many traces of her Italian ancestry: "Restée Italienne par son imagination ... elle sentait l'art et la nature comme on ne les sent qu'en Italie."¹

Sainte-Beuve felt that in certain marked ways the regional group, the tribe, as it were, of which a man was born, exercised a profound influence, declaring, for example, that the soldier Montluc derived his prowess from his native Gascony: "Le Gascon Montluc, en propos et en action, c'est un héros de Corneille venu un peu plus tôt ... il est un caractère constant et qui frappe dans les talents comme dans les courages de cette généreuse contrée."² But a better example, because clearer, is that of the Abbé Prévost: "Ainsi donc, il dut beaucoup ... à sa race du *bon pays d'Artois*, comme il l'appelait."³ "Cependant on n'est pas du midi impunément" is the way in which he explains certain characteristics of Seiyès.⁴ And Raynouard too was from the south of France:

Nul homme distingué ne garda plus que Raynouard le cachet primitif de sa province, de son endroit [*il était de Brignolles*]. Il était avant tout de son pays par l'accent ... il en était par le cœur, par le patriotisme, par les idées ... il était de son pays aussi par la gaieté, par le trait, par le petit mot pour rire.

Even his erudition he related to "son midi à lui."⁵ "N'oublions pas ... que Mme Du Deffand était de Bourgogne; elle semble tenir de cette verve du terroir, qui inspira tant de piquants *noëls* aux Piron et aux La Monnoye."⁶ This province, fertile in wits, gave birth also to Bussy-Rabutin, "qui eut beaucoup en lui de cette veine railleuse et mordante, de cet esprit de saillies dont on fait honneur à sa province, et dont on retrouve maint témoignage direct chez les Piron, les La Monnoye, les Du Deffand";⁷ and Piron, too, "tient de sa province en général" in this respect.⁸

In the same vein he writes of Le Sage, emphasizing this time, however, more the territorial than the racial aspects of his Breton birth:

Les plus exactes biographes le font naître ... en basse Bretagne. Du fond de cette province énergique et rude, d'où nous sont venus de grands écrivains ... Le Sage nous arriva ... on ne trouverait quelque chose du coin breton en lui que dans sa fierté d'âme et son indépendance de caractère.⁹

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, II, 331.

² *Ibid.*, XI, 57.

³ *Ibid.*, IX, 124.

⁴ *Ibid.*, V, 201.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 2 ff.

⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 422.

⁷ *Ibid.*, III, 360.

⁸ *Nouveaux lundis*, VII, 405.

⁹ *Causeries du lundi*, II, 354.

Volney, born on the border between Anjou and Brittany, partook more of the "âpreté bretonne" than of the "mollesse angevine."¹ Mme Necker's Swiss birth had much to do with her development,² as did also Rousseau's,³ while St. François de Sales,⁴ Guy Patin,⁵ and Roederer⁶ partook distinctly of the qualities of their native lands. Camille Jordan, Sainte-Beuve claims, was essentially a Lyonnais:

Né à Lyon ... il resta toute sa vie l'homme de son pays et de sa ville natale ... le type originel ... ne s'affaiblit jamais. ... Ce caractère porte avec lui un certain fonds de croyances ... qui se maintient au milieu de l'effacement ou du dessèchement trop général des âmes.⁷

At times the very aspect of the countryside in which a man is born seems to influence his psychology, as in the case of Saint Lambert,⁸ of Maurice de Guérin,⁹ and pre-eminently of Taine, on whom his native Ardennes exercised great power:

Ces Ardennes, en effet, puissantes et vastes ... ont-ils contribué ... à remplir, à meubler de bonne heure l'imagination du jeune et grave enfant? Ce qui est certain, c'est qu'il y a dans son talent des masses un peu fortes, des suites un peu compactes et continues, et où l'éclat et la magnificence même n'épargnent pas la fatigue ... on lui voudrait parfois plus d'ouvertures et plus d'éclaircies dans ses riches Ardennes.¹⁰

Sainte-Beuve places the emphasis of strong and reiterated statement upon the dictum that the critic shall place the author, the statesman, or the philosopher, whoever his chosen subject, in his age, in his epoch, and upon occasion should study both the epochs preceding and succeeding that to which his subject belongs. In fully three-fourths of the essays there is some important consideration of the social and historical milieu out of which the person or the work under consideration has arisen. This is the most consistent and pervasive evidence of Sainte-Beuve's scientific-mindedness as a critic. Indeed it is so constant and pervasive that it is not easy to isolate instances for citation. Running through almost every essay is the sense of epoch, of spiritual and social environment and background. To take the fewest examples, Sainte-Beuve says that Janin was obliged to change his plan and method of writing when the Revolution of 1848 declared itself,¹¹ Huet

¹ *Ibid.*, VII, 390.

² *Ibid.*, IV, 243.

³ *Ibid.*, III, 96.

⁴ *Ibid.*, VII, 267.

⁵ *Ibid.*, VIII, 89.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

⁷ *Nouveaux lundis*, XII, 256.

⁸ *Causeries du lundi*, XI, 122.

⁹ *Ibid.*, XV, 12, 15.

¹⁰ *Nouveaux lundis*, VIII, 71.

¹¹ *Causeries du lundi*, II, 108.

was what he was and saw as he did because of the state of French Letters in his day.¹ The same explanations and interpretations he finds for Pasquier in the sixteenth century and Octave Feuillet in the nineteenth.²

The atmosphere and influence which molds men Sainte-Beuve conveys rather by accumulation of detail than by generalized assertion, as witness this passage, which is thoroughly typical of his method, on Balzac: "Il avait quinze ans à la chute de l'Empire; il a donc connu et senti l'époque impériale." He lived also under the Restoration:

Il a senti la Restauration en amant. Il commençait à arriver à la réputation en même temps que s'installait le nouveau régime promulgué en Juillet 1830 ... ainsi ces trois époques de physionomie si diverse qui constituent le siècle arrivé à son milieu, M. de Balzac les a connues et les a vécues toutes les trois, et son œuvre en est jusqu'à un certain point le miroir.³

He works in the same strain in various epochs, picturing the society at the time of La Bruyère which gave birth to the *Caractères*,⁴ and the general mind of the later part of the Revolution and early part of the nineteenth century, which produced the public discourses of Benjamin Constant.⁵ One has but to open a volume of the *Causeries* or the *Nouveaux lundis* to find constant examples of this interest and method.⁶

One of the important items in a man's background is his family, says Sainte-Beuve, formulating his maxim thus: "On retrouve à coup sûr l'homme supérieur au moins en partie dans ses parents, dans sa mère surtout ... dans ses sœurs aussi, dans ses frères, dans ses enfants mêmes."⁷ Before examining whether or no Sainte-Beuve investigated this matter, it is necessary to point out that nothing is made here of the innumerable cases in which he merely mentions the parentage of his subject, naming his father and mother, one or both, as a bit of biographical routine. Sainte-Beuve, like all biographers, seldom fails to tell in this perfunctory way the origin of the person whom he is studying, as, for example, "fille d'un des officiers du Duc de Lorraine, et petite nièce, par sa mère, du fameux Callot,"⁸ or of Rabelais, "fils d'un cabaretier de Chinon,"⁹ or of Marivaux, "né d'un père financier et dans l'aisance."¹⁰ Such passages have not been counted or noted in detail. But there are

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, II, 166.

² *Ibid.*, III, 250; *Nouveaux lundis*, V, 3.

³ *Causeries du lundi*, II, 444.

⁴ *Nouveaux lundis*, I, 126.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 418.

⁶ Cf. also *Causeries du lundi*, XV, 248.

⁷ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 18.

⁸ *Causeries du lundi*, II, 209.

⁹ *Ibid.*, III, 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, IX, 343.

cases in which actual influence or significant resemblances between a man and the members of his family have been emphasized or elaborated by Sainte-Beuve. These have been collected as follows: after speaking of the family of Lacordaire: "Je n'ai pas voulu omettre ces premières circonstances; car il n'est pas indifférent, selon moi ... d'être sorti d'une race solide et saine";¹ the father of Théodore Leclercq was "un bon bourgeois parisien" and "la riche bourgeoisie parisienne a, de tout temps, produit des esprits fins, des railleurs distingués et libres."² Maurice de Guérin's noble family and Mme Desbordes-Valmore's humble one left indelible impressions on these two artists.³ Of Mirabeau he says: "il avait en naissant, apporté plusieurs des traits essentiels de la famille paternelle, mais en les combinant avec d'autres qui tenaient de sa mère";⁴ and of Horace Vernet he declares that he was a painter by inheritance, it was "un talent de race"—by which he means here "family"—"de quelque côté qu'on remonte dans ses origines, on ne voit que peintres et dessinateurs."⁵ Piron also "tient de sa famille en particulier. ... Les Piron étaient une souche de chansonniers, de malins compères et de satiriques."⁶ Mme de Motteville's good sense came from her family: "Je relève tout d'abord ce fonds de sagesse, qui semblait appartenir à la race,"⁷ and Léopold Robert's simplicity and democracy can be seen in his family also.⁸ The family as a unit is, then, genuinely creative in molding the genius.

In the immediate family it is the mother to whom one looks for the most powerful influence; the most notable instance perhaps is that of the mother of Littré, the savant. Sainte-Beuve devotes a paragraph to telling of her birth and qualities and adds "avec cela douée d'une élévation d'âme et d'un sentiment de la justice qu'elle dut transmettre à ce fils. ... Il tient beaucoup d'elle."⁹ Ducis, born of a French mother and a Savoyard father, "était *lion* par son père et *berger* par sa mère."¹⁰ The mother of Le Président De Brosses "était femme forte ... et faite aussi pour transmettre à son fils le zèle des nobles et solides traditions."¹¹ He goes out of his way to give accounts of their mothers' influence on Huet,¹² on Fontenelle,¹³ on l'Abbé de Choisy,¹⁴ and

¹ *Ibid.*, I, 223.

² *Ibid.*, III, 528.

³ *Ibid.*, XII, 232; *Nouveaux lundis*, XII, 186.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, IV, 3.

⁵ *Nouveaux lundis*, V, 43.

⁶ *Ibid.*, VII, 405.

⁷ *Causeries du lundi*, V, 169.

⁸ *Ibid.*, X, 411.

⁹ *Nouveaux lundis*, V, 204.

¹⁰ *Causeries du lundi*, VI, 457.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, VII, 86.

¹² *Ibid.*, II, 166.

¹³ *Ibid.*, III, 315.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 429.

on Joseph de Maistre.¹ Finally Sainte-Beuve describes Mirabeau's inheritance from his mother in these terms:

Il tenait de sa mère la largeur du visage, les instincts, les appétits prodigues et sensuels, mais probablement aussi ce certain *fonds gaillard* et gaulois, cette faculté de se familiariser et de s'humaniser que les Riquetti (his father's family) n'avaient pas, et qui deviendra un des moyens de sa puissance.²

As the mother's influence may be active in a man, so lack of her influence may produce certain traits, as in the case of Volney and of Gibbon, "ceux à qui a manqué cette sollicitude d'une mère ... sont plus aisément que d'autres dénués du sentiment de la religion."³ On the whole we may say that, consistently with his maxim concerning the family, it is to the mother's influence that Sainte-Beuve uniformly attributes the most importance.

While there is not so frequent consideration of the father's influence and the cases are not so specific or detailed, the following instances are to be noted. Huet received much from his father, "le talent poétique qu'il montra, il dut l'avoir hérité de lui."⁴ Mirabeau's father impressed himself upon his son through his indomitable will, his rigidity, and cruelty.⁵ Pierre Dupont "par son père tient à la classe des artisans," and this was a distinctive factor in his poetry.⁶ Sainte-Beuve tells in some detail the life-history of the elder Sainte-Simon, pointing out those things which his son must have inherited or which must otherwise have passed from his father into his consciousness and character: "On découvre même dans le père de Saint-Simon une qualité dont ne sera pas privé son fils, une sorte d'humeur qui, au besoin, devient de l'aigreur."⁷ The characterization of the father of Alexis Piron as the literary as well as the natural parent of his son must also be instanced here. Sainte-Beuve felt that he himself had inherited his literary bent and had derived his literary talent from his father,⁸ and reference must be made again to the article on Littré in which there is a fairly detailed history of Littré *père*, with special bearing upon his spiritual relationship to his son.⁹ Sainte-Beuve quotes Ducis as saying of the elder Ducis: "C'est lui qui, par son sang et ses exemples, a transmis à mon âme ses principaux traits et ses *maîtresses formes*."¹⁰ P. L. Courier's father's quarrel with a

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, IV, 194.

² *Ibid.*, IV, 3.

³ *Ibid.*, VIII, 436.

⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 167.

⁵ *Ibid.*, IV, 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁷ *Ibid.*, XV, 427.

⁸ *Cahiers*, p. 56.

⁹ *Nouveaux lundis*, V, 201.

¹⁰ *Causeries du lundi*, VI, 457.

grand seigneur was inherited by his son and became a main tenet in his political creed.¹ One of the most extended of the studies of fathers is that of Mme Dacier's parent, an erudite but not pedantic man, who transmitted much of his inspiration and not a little of his knowledge to his distinguished daughter:

Fille d'un savant et d'un érudit, [elle] ne faisait, en s'adonnant, comme elle fit, à l'antiquité, qu'obéir à l'esprit de famille et céder à une sorte d'hérédité domestique. Il faut lui passer d'être érudite comme à la fille de Pythagore d'avoir été philosophe, comme à la fille de l'orateur Hortensius d'avoir été éloquente, comme à la fille du grand jurisconsulte Accurse d'avoir excellé dans le droit.²

The critic may find a study of the subject's brothers and sisters very fruitful, for in them, says Sainte-Beuve, the peculiarities of the great man may often be seen "plus à nu et à l'état simple."³ Sainte-Beuve himself gives us striking examples of this principle: the sisters of Chateaubriand (who share the essential characteristics of their great brother unmixed with many elements added by his more complex experience); the sisters of Lamartine; Mme de Surville, Balzac's sister; and Julie, sister of Beaumarchais. This Julie possessed the spirit of Gallic gaiety which is so marked in her dramatist brother.⁴ Diderot's sister also exhibited many traits in common with her brother:

Il avait une sœur d'un caractère original, d'un cœur excellent, brave fille qui ne se maria point pour mieux servir son père, "vive, agissante, gaie, décidée, prompte à s'offenser, lente à revenir, sans souci ni sur le présent ni sur l'avenir, ... libre dans ses actions, plus libre encore dans ses propos: une espèce de *Diogène femelle*." On entrevoit en quoi Diderot tenait d'elle, et en quoi il en différait: elle était la branche restée rude et sauvageonne, lui le rameau greffé, cultivé, adouci, épanoui.⁵

M. Coulmann had a beautiful and accomplished sister, evidently of the same stock as himself,⁶ and Ernest Renan's sister Henriette was like a second mother to him and shared in many of his qualities.⁷ Perhaps the best case of all is that of the De Guérins, Maurice and Eugénie, where the latter actually shared her brother's genius and exercised a genuine and traceable spiritual and intellectual influence upon him.⁸

There are perhaps not so many cases in which Sainte-Beuve finds light thrown upon a genius by the study of a brother. The first and

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

² *Ibid.*, IX, 477.

³ Cf. "Scientific Criticism," p. 36.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, VI, 256.

⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 294.

⁶ *Nouveaux lundis*, IX, 137.

⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 385.

⁸ *Causeries du lundi*, XII, 235 ff.

classic instance is, however, that of Boileau, in which Sainte-Beuve offers the two brothers of "the lawgiver of Parnassus" as examples and proof of his theory:¹ "La nature avait combiné en Despréaux les traits de l'un et de l'autre" (of his two brothers), but nature has added to Boileau himself the element of genius. This idea interested Sainte-Beuve so much that he develops it in another passage at some length.² He studies first Gilles Boileau, *avocat et rimeur*, who lacked only solidity and taste to be like his great brother: then he studies Jacques Boileau, "dit l'Abbé Boileau, ... qui par ses calembours et ses gaietés, me fait assez l'effet d'un Despréaux en facétie et en belle humeur." He sums up: "Il me semble que la nature ... essayait déjà un premier crayon de Nicolas quand elle créa Gilles ... puis elle fit Jacques ... Gilles est l'ébauche, Jacques est la charge, Nicolas est le portrait."³ He draws an outline portrait of Diderot's brother, pointing out what he has in common with the philosopher;⁴ he describes Georges de Scudéry in his essay on Mlle de Scudéry;⁵ the brother of Mézeray is studied to show certain peculiarities of the more famous man and to illuminate certain traits of his character.⁶ The anecdote he tells about Piron and his brothers being tried out by their father is diverting and illuminating;⁷ but he treats in a more serious vein the three Perrault brothers, the doctor, the architect, and the writer, all men of genius.⁸ On the whole he seems to have found brothers important as illustrations and illuminations rather than as influences.

As an example of studying the children of the person under discussion Saint-Beuve makes much of the case of Mme de Sévigné and her children, son and daughter; she "semblait d'être dédoublée dans ses deux enfants: le Chevalier, léger, étourdi, ayant la grâce, et Mme de Grignan, intelligente mais un peu froide, ayant pris pour elle la raison."⁹ He briefly adduces another in the case of the Comtesse de Fontanes, and her sister—"chanoinesse, fille du poète qui m'a aidé à mieux comprendre et à me mieux représenter le poète leur père."¹⁰ Mme de Staël furnishes an illuminating contrast to her mother, Mme Necker,¹¹ while Mme Girardin and the Countess O'Donnell aid in explaining their mother, Mme Sophie Gay.¹² More striking and more detailed than any of these

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 20.

² *Causeries du lundi*, VI, 496.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 498.

⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 294.

⁵ *Ibid.*, IV, 121.

⁶ *Ibid.*, VIII, 197.

⁷ *Nouveaux lundis*, VII, 406.

⁸ *Causeries du lundi*, V, 257.

⁹ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 20.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹¹ *Causeries du lundi*, IV, 257.

¹² *Ibid.*, VI, 64.

is his study of the personality of Mme Desbordes-Valmore in that of her daughters Inez and Ondine:

Ondine était poétique aussi et même poète; elle tenait de sa mère le don du chant. ... Cette charmante Ondine avait des points de ressemblance ... avec sa mère. ... A la différence de sa mère qui se prodiguait à tous ... elle sentait le besoin de se recueillir, de se réserver; ... Ondine étudiait beaucoup.²

Then follows a quite detailed statement of the literary talents and acquirements of the charming Ondine.

There is no instance in which Sainte-Beuve makes a study of unsuccessful or merely negative kindred by way of throwing light on his important personage. The psychology of his day attached no importance to this kind of evidence, and we could scarcely expect him to have appreciated its value.

Summarizing, we conclude that it is evident from the number and importance of the instances assembled that Sainte-Beuve did have the principle of the study of a man's kindred always in his consciousness, and he found that its application constantly yielded him adequate reward.

Next in natural order is a discussion of Sainte-Beuve's dictum that it is important for the critic to study the childhood, youth, and education of his subject. It is easy to dispose of this in its most general aspect, for never did Sainte-Beuve fail, when the scope and scheme of his essay permitted it, to give attention, sometimes scrupulous attention, to the educational experience of his subject. It is with intention that the phrase "when the scope and scheme of his essay permitted it" is used, for certain essays are concerned with the review of a single book, certain others deal with an epoch or a movement in which human figures are minimized. In such essays there is no invitation to consider in any detail a separate man's education. But in those papers in which the critic presents a man's life he invariably makes much of his youth and education, both the more formal training which he derived from books, masters, and schools and the informal education that came to him from his physical and social environment. A few typical and significant instances follow. His study of Florian's youth points out those influences which helped to form the pretty talent of the fabulist: he was brought up and educated in an intellectual atmosphere of wit, in a social atmosphere of gentility, among people of gentle manners; he was petted and spoiled and praised, and his dwelling in the Alps developed in him "un sentiment tout nouveau, plein de fraîcheur, l'amour de la

² *Nouveaux lundis*, XII, 168.

nature."¹ In the case of De Maistre, Sainte-Beuve says of his education that "il avait été élevé selon l'esprit de la sévérité antique, et il en garda toujours le cachet dans ses mœurs et dans son caractère," and then proceeds to show how this "première éducation pure, étroite et forte" made De Maistre what he was, "comme ces chênes qui prennent pied dans une terre un peu âpre et qui s'enracinent plus fermement entre les rochers."² A noted instance of his studies of education may be found in the Taine article. Take two of the details of this study: first, the early environment of Taine's childhood, in the Ardennes, educated by his father and uncle, men of sterling worth and character; second, his experience in the École Normale, which he entered in 1810, and in which he spent three years. In this school in Taine's day the students did most of the instructing, teaching one another in free debate, only guided by the *maîtres de conférence*. Sainte-Beuve traces in much detail the probable result on the young minds and the actual result on Taine:

Les avantages d'une telle palestre savante ... sont au delà de ce qu'on peut dire ... et l'on sait quelle forte et brillante élite est sortie de cette éducation féconde, orageuse, toute française. Nul, en s'émancipant, n'y est resté plus fidèle que M. Taine et ne fait plus d'honneur à la sévérité de ses origines.³

In his study of Cowper, Sainte-Beuve finds much explanatory material in the childhood and earliest education of the poet. Cowper, deprived almost in infancy of the mother who was so well equipped to train the sensitive, imaginative child, fell into the hands of rigorous teachers. His earliest religious instruction planted ineradicably in his consciousness the terrifying images and the paralyzing doctrines of a thoroughgoing Calvinistic theology. His experience in school subjected him to the dreads and terrors of a cruelty exercised by severe masters and brutal older boys. All these experiences co-operated with his naturally shrinking and sensitive temperament to render him the victim, even in his dreams, of nameless and ungovernable fears. Twice he was precipitated into insanity by sheer fright, sheer dread of appearing in public, and all his life he had recurring spells of melancholia, projecting over his life the dim shadows of his childhood's experiences. This interested Sainte-Beuve immensely. He translated in full Cowper's touching poem on his mother's picture, and he draws in full detail the facts of Cowper's childhood.⁴ Though we know now that Cowper's madness was tempera-

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 232. ² *Ibid.*, IV, 193. ³ *Nouveaux lundis*, VIII, 74.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, XI, 141. Compare Sainte-Beuve's treatment with that of Thomas Wright, *The Life of William Cowper* (1892), pp. 59, 113, 205, 310, 450. He shows that Cowper's melancholia was temperamental, and that his early experiences only colored it.

mental and his experiences rather the occasion than the causes of his insanity, we still justify Sainte-Beuve's immense interest in his case. Two more cases may be cited with profit, though the list could be prolonged; that of Rollin, who "était du *Pays latin*," and to understand whom "il faut remonter à cette vie antérieure durant laquelle il s'était formé," the university life;¹ and the second instance, that of Maurice de Guérin, in whom Sainte-Beuve studies the *époque nourricière* of his talent, his stay in Brittany.² We may say then that Sainte-Beuve in all those essays which took the biographical form gave special consideration to the facts of childhood, education, and youth, in certain striking instances amplifying the matter, and in a few cases, as with Taine and Cowper, following in a penetrating study the effects of early experience into the later life and work of his subject.

Sainte-Beuve reckons as important in the complete understanding of a man the knowledge of "le premier groupe d'amis et de contemporains" with whom he was associated. In a few important cases he himself places the man in his group of contemporaries. He gives as examples the cases of Boileau, La Fontaine, and Molière; of Chateaubriand, Fontanes, and Joubert; the reunion at Göttingen of Bürger, Voss, Hölty, and Stolberg; the critical circle of Jeffrey in Edinburgh; the society to which Thomas Moore belonged in Dublin³—these cases he cites to test his theory. When it comes to his own practice, in many cases he sets the writer firmly in his group, as for example the etcher Gavarni:

Lui aussi, il était de ce groupe d'artistes chercheurs, voués à la production féconde, à la rénovation de l'art dans tous les genres, et dont la naissance, remontant aux premières années du siècle, a été comme proclamée à son de trompe dans ce vers célèbre: "Le siècle avait deux ans." ... Variez le chiffre ... et vous aurez, en sept ou huit ans, toute la couvée réunie, tout le groupe.⁴

Another example is that of Maurice de Guérin: "Né le 5 août 1810 il appartenait à cette seconde génération du siècle lequel n'avait plus *deux* ou *trois* ans, mais bien dix ou onze lorsqu'il produisait cette volée nouvelle des Musset, des Montalambert, des Guérin; je joins exprès ces noms."⁵ A little later in the century Théophile Gautier and the *Jeunes France* were occupied à *épater le bourgeois* when in 1833 he, with Camille Rogier, Gérard de Nerval, Arsène Houssaye, Bouchardy, Célestin Nanteuil, Jean Duseigneur, Petrus Borel, Théophile Dondey (called O'Neddy),

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, VI, 262.

² *Ibid.*, XV, 17.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 21.

⁴ *Ibid.*, VI, 143.

⁵ *Causeries du lundi*, XV, 3.

and Auguste Maquet, used to gather every evening in the *impasse du Doyenné*.¹ The group with which Ampère was connected in his youth—Sautelet, Frank Carré, Jules Bastide, Albert Stapfer—all read *Obermann* and all suffered from his spiritual malady.² Taine's contemporaries at the École Normale were, among others, Edmond About, Prévost-Paradol, Weiss, sharing a common interest and a common vocation.³ At the time of Duclos the literary world was divided between the two great cafés, *Procope* and *Gradot*. Duclos patronized the former with Boindin, l'Abbé Terrasson, Fréret, and Piron.⁴ Another instance of Sainte-Beuve's studying *le premier milieu* is in the case of Parny, who came to Paris in 1770 and there joined

une petite coterie de jeunes gens ... qui soupaient, aimaient, faisaient des vers, et ne prenaient la vie à son début que comme une légère et riante orgie ... mais le propre de cette aimable société ... c'est que la distinction, l'élégance, le goût de l'esprit surnageaient toujours jusque dans le vin et les plaisirs.⁵

Joubert in his youth was a member of a group "ce qu'il fit en ces années de jeunesse peut se résumer en ce seul mot. Il causa avec les gens de lettres en renom; il connut Marmontel, La Harpe, D'Alembert: il connut surtout Diderot ... l'influence de ce dernier sur lui fut grande."⁶ It is to be noted that in the former cases Sainte-Beuve mentions the *volée* of kindred spirits, the common children of an epoch; while in the case of Joubert the names he mentions are of those friends who exercised a formative influence on him. He says furthermore of these friends of Joubert that "ils se sentaient nés pour une œuvre commune."⁷

It is desirable to study a writer, says Sainte-Beuve, at his début, at the moment of his first success, when he has declared himself, but before he has acquired any mannerisms. This is on the whole the item in his program that Sainte-Beuve most frequently uses, since he holds it important to study a man's first work, analyzing and estimating it at the moment of his entry into the lists. Especially significant are his studies of the first appearance of Montalambert,⁸ of Mme Récamier,⁹ of Adrienne Lecouvreur,¹⁰ of Lacordaire,¹¹ of Alfred de Musset,¹² of Mazarin,¹³ of Leclercq.¹⁴ Indeed, in a large group of biographical essays taken at random

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, VI, 277.

² *Ibid.*, XIII, 192.

³ *Ibid.*, VIII, 72.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, IX, 208.

⁵ *Ibid.*, XV, 286.

⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 161.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 297.

¹³ *Ibid.*, II, 250.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 546.

from the two series it was found that nearly all gave attention to the literary début of the subject, many of them emphasizing it. Among those that emphasize the author's first success and then trace its influence in his later life notable ones are the essays on Parny,¹ on Pariset,² on Alfred de Vigny (in this case very carefully);³ he makes much of Taine's work on La Fontaine, saying that it forestalls most that was best in his later work.⁴ Perhaps the best example of his use of this principle is his study of the youth of Moreau before he became spoiled and pessimistic by contact with the world:⁵ "Il y eut en ces années un Hégésippe Moreau primitif, pur, naturel, adolescent, non irrité, point irréligieux, dans toute la fleur de sensibilité et de bonté, animé de tous les instincts généreux, et non encore atteint des maladies du siècle."⁶ In the case of Magnin, Sainte-Beuve reiterates his principle: "Je vise toujours ... à juger les écrivains d'après leur force initiale et en les débarrassant de ce qu'ils ont de surajouté ou d'acquis," and then goes into a long description of the youthful qualities of the famous editor of the *Globe*.⁷ One more striking example cannot be passed over, that of the youth of Corneille and his first great success: "Quant à Corneille, il n'y a qu'une manière de le bien apprécier, c'est de le voir à son moment, à son début. ... Reportons nous à l'heure unique du *Cid* et à ce qu'elle inaugura. C'est le point de vue véritable d'où il convient d'envisager Corneille";⁸ and he devotes four essays to the study of this sublime work.

We might almost predict, knowing Sainte-Beuve's balanced and logical mind, that he would say next that we should know a man's mind at the close of his working life, at the moment "où il se gâte, où il se corrompt, où il déchoit, où il dévie,"⁹ at the moment of his professional and artistic dissolution. He describes Mme du Deffand, full of humor and gaiety, "telle elle était à l'âge où expirent les derniers rayons de la jeunesse,"¹⁰ but she fought against oncoming old age. Mme Récamier, on the contrary, he finds, did not struggle, but accepted her fate gracefully, "quand [elle] vit s'avancer l'heure où la beauté baisse et pâlit elle fit ce que bien peu de femmes savent faire; elle ne lutta point; elle accepta avec goût les premières marques du temps,"¹¹ and Sainte-Beuve praises her highly for this proof and exhibition of her philosophy and good

¹ *Ibid.*, XV, 286.

² *Ibid.*, I, 401, 411.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, VI, 403.

⁴ *Ibid.*, VIII, 73.

⁵ *Causeries du lundi*, IV, 53.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Nouveaux lundis*, V, 446.

⁸ *Ibid.*, VII, 220.

⁹ *Ibid.*, III, 36.

¹⁰ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 418.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

taste. The fabulist Florian allowed himself to exaggerate some of his qualities in his old age.¹ Mlle de Scudéry and Théodore Leclercq are taken up at this interesting moment of their careers also.² In no case are the inferences as clear and instructive as the program itself would lead one to expect, and it seems that Sainte-Beuve scarcely made the most of his opportunity in respect to this aspect of his criticism. He seems never to have been as much interested in the investigation of the qualities exhibited in a man's latest work as in those of his earliest.

The next step in Sainte-Beuve's ritual of criticism carries us into a man's private and intimate life. Here he says that there are certain questions we must ask, the answers to which throw essential light on the nature and quality of a man's character.³ The first of these questions is, "Que pensait-il de la religion?" Unless the occasion demanded, as in the treatment of a religious philosopher or that of an abbé or a preacher, Sainte-Beuve did not often press or answer this question. He throws in a sentence or two, such as this on Barnave: "Ses parents professaient la religion réformée, mais il ne paraît y avoir rien puisé, en aucun temps, qu'une certaine habitude réfléchie et grave."⁴ The Abbé Galiani he describes as essentially the religious philosopher of the eighteenth century.⁵ The case, however, of Cowper remains the most instructive because his fatalistic Calvinism colored his whole life and work.⁶ It is scarcely necessary to cite the instances of Pascal, Fléchier, Bourdaloue, François de Sales, Fénelon, Bossuet, Rousseau, and the philosophers of the nineteenth century, Saint-Simon, Lacordaire, Montalambert and the rest, in which the subject necessitates or suggests the treatment of religion. However, aside from those mentioned, scarcely any are of first-rate importance or are worked out in detail. He more often mentions the religion of the women he criticizes than that of the men.

The second question Sainte-Beuve would ask is, "Comment était ... il affecté du spectacle de la nature?" He answers this question in the case of Maurice de Guérin, saying that the poet identified himself with nature and felt himself at one with her: "Tous les accidents naturels qui passent, une pluie d'avril, une bourrasque de mars, une tendre et capricieuse nuaison de mai, tout lui parle, tout le saisit et l'enlève; il a beau s'arrêter en de courts instants."⁷ Mme de Motteville

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 247.

² *Ibid.*, IV, 139; III, 547.

³ Cf. *supra*, p. 38.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, II, 24.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 429.

⁶ *Ibid.*, XI, 146.

⁷ *Ibid.*, XV, 11.

"avait puisé dans sa belle Normandie l'amour de la campagne et de la nature, mais elle n'en savait pas jouir en courant";¹ Volney was given to philosophizing in the manner of the eighteenth-century philosophers in the presence of Alpine peaks;² Cowper was a lover of the countryside, *amant de la nature*, knowing each and every one of her aspects and moods;³ even in Fléchier "on retrouve, sous l'expression artificielle, un certain goût et un sentiment fleuri de la nature."⁴ One need but touch on what he says of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre⁵ and Rousseau⁶ in respect to their appreciation of natural beauty—any critic writing of them would be obliged to discuss so salient a characteristic; but of peculiar interest is the passage on Chapelle and Bachaumont wherein he practically sums up the attitude of the seventeenth century toward nature and country things, contrasting it with that of the ancients. Their travels through the country were less voyages of discovery than "travestiments et parodies de la nature."⁷ Only La Fontaine is at home in the country, the first author before Rousseau with a genuine sentiment of nature.⁸ The classical attitude is aptly summed up in Malherbe: "Il a très peu d'images empruntées directement à la nature; c'est un citadin, un homme de cabinet."⁹

The third intimate question for Sainte-Beuve is, "Comment se comportait ... il sur l'article des femmes?" Sainte-Beuve esteemed this an important question, the answer to which revealed more of the man's personality than either of the preceding philosophic queries. It chimed in with his practical bent, and then, besides, it expressed something very influential in his thinking; he had what amounted to an obsession on some aspects of the sex question. His subconscious, and, for the matter of that, his superconscious, opinion was that men are loose when they are not licentious in matters of sex, and women but little better. As a matter of course he discusses in a man's life-history his loves proper and those illicit, and when he comes upon a man who has had no illicit love affairs of the kind that he was most interested in he remarks upon the fact with disappointed astonishment. Such a case is that of Joubert, whose love for Mme de Beaumont was of the kind and degree known as Platonic, but which Sainte-Beuve regarded as most

¹ *Ibid.*, V, 180. ² *Ibid.*, VII, 400. ³ *Ibid.*, XI, 179. ⁴ *Ibid.*, XV, 403.

⁵ *Ibid.*, VI, 416; *Portraits littéraires*, II, 111.

⁶ *Causeries du lundi*, VIII, 417; I, 368.

⁷ *Ibid.*, XI, 46-47.

⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 368, 461; III, 89; XI, 48.

⁹ *Nouveaux lundis*, XIII, 413.

potent in its influence upon the character of Joubert.¹ A similar case was that of Vauvenargues, who was constantly irritated by the refusal of women to remain on a plane of friendship: "Les femmes ne peuvent comprendre, dit-il, qu'il y ait des hommes désintéressés à leur égard."² Nor did Saint-Simon, young-old man that he was, ever enjoy feminine society.³ These are the kind of men that surprised and baffled Sainte-Beuve; most of those whom he discussed were influenced by women—some of them by many women; the currents of the lives of many of them had been altered by their experiences in love. In half the biographical essays these relations of men and women are studied; there is the essay on Chaulieu who had several mistresses,⁴ each of whom was influential, and those on the various kings of France, Louis XIV,⁵ François I, and Henri IV.⁶ The instance of Roederer is interesting, the feminine influence here being of a different sort:

Les femmes jouèrent toujours un grand rôle dans la pensée de Roederer; il les aimait ... pour leur esprit, pour leur conversation, pour le charme qu'elles mettaient dans la société, et pour la part de culture qu'elles apportèrent dans la formation de la langue.⁷

Retz "était extrêmement libertin,"⁸ Rivarol married but separated from his wife, took with him in his travels a certain "Manette, qui joue un certain rôle dans sa vie intime"; Sainte-Beuve says he speaks of this Manette to show "comment Rivarol n'avait point dans ses mœurs toute la gravité qui convient à ceux qui défendent si hautement les principes primordiaux de la société," etc.⁹ He follows with interest the marital difficulties of La Harpe¹⁰ and the amorous intrigues of Patru.¹¹ The history of Hégésippe Moreau was different; he had had a first love, "une sœur," as he called her, who retained his image pure and clean in her heart, and remained always to him a reminder of his old and better self, though she could not stay long with him to prevent his becoming embittered with life. He needed a woman's influence:

Il lui fallait, comme à tous les poètes doux et faibles, sauvages et timides, tendres et reconnaissants, il lui aurait fallu une femme, une sœur, une mère, qui mêlée et confondue avec l'amante, l'eût dispensé de tout, hormis de chanter, d'aimer et de rêver.¹²

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 163. Joubert's supposed Puritanism has recently been disproved by A. Beaunier.

² *Ibid.*, III, 139.

⁶ *Ibid.*, VII, 436; VIII, 400.

³ *Ibid.*, XV, 430.

⁷ *Ibid.*, VIII, 387.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 466.

⁸ *Ibid.*, V, 43.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 451 ff.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹² *Ibid.*, IV, 54, 61.

Another of the questions the answer to which Sainte-Beuve considers revelatory of character and experience is, "Comment se comportait-il sur l'article de l'argent? Était-il riche? Était-il pauvre?" But he himself discussed this matter in very few cases; there is a matter of only twenty-five essays in which he handles it at all. In the *Talleyrand* he says:

L'argent tint de tout temps la plus grande place dans les préoccupations de M. de Talleyrand. Et puisque j'y suis, je ne me refuserai pas de couler à fond cet article de cupidité honteuse dont le personnage politique en lui a tant souffert, et s'est trouvé si atteint, si gâté au cœur et véritablement avili.¹

Then follows a study of this passion with anecdotes to illustrate the points. He describes the ruses to which need of money may drive an artist: "L'argent tourmentait beaucoup Bernis," who was driven to many subterfuges to obtain the money he needed for his distinguished social duties.² Malherbe was a cautious bourgeois in money matters,³ and of Raynouard "on disait qu'il était très parcimonieux,"⁴ but he was very liberal to his own family. More than once he notes that lack of money produced certain traits of character and conditioned experience, as in the case, once more, of Moreau, who was embittered by poverty: "Moreau ressentait vivement les tortures secrètes de cette pauvreté que La Bruyère a si bien peinte, et qui rend l'homme honteux, de peur d'être ridicule."⁵

Sainte-Beuve would have the critic discover and present the personal appearance, the physical presence, of his subject, with his state of health, his daily régime, and he himself takes pains to do this for his own subjects, especially in those cases where there was something unusual or anything that was likely to react upon the mental life. For example, the Abbé Galiani was not more than four feet and a half in height, with "un petit corps très bien taillé et très joli, ce n'était qu'esprit, grâce, saillie et sel pur," and at the same time so wise and so learned as to merit the name of Harlequin-Plato;⁶ Mirabeau "était d'une atroce laideur," pock-marked and broad-faced, but with beautiful eyes and an immense and abounding physical force;⁷ Benjamin Constant "était un beau grand jeune homme, d'un blond hardi, muscadin, à l'air candide," etc.;⁸ the feminine prettiness of the Abbé de Choisy contributed largely to

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, XII, 54.

⁵ *Ibid.*, IV, 57.

² *Causeries du lundi*, VIII, 17.

⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 421.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, XIII, 394.

⁷ *Ibid.*, IV, 4.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, V, 21.

⁸ *Nouveaux lundis*, I, 415.

making him effeminate;¹ he discusses the personal appearance of Retz,² Le Brun-Pindar,³ Stendhal,⁴ Saint-Martin,⁵ not to mention others, for indeed he rarely neglects this point.

At times the bad health of the author reacts upon his work, as in the case of Moreau, whose sickness and physical misery left him *des douloureux souvenirs*, reflected in his verse.⁶ This had something to do with Pope's poetry also,⁷ with the social and religious philosophy of Saint-Martin.⁸ It is needless to cite more instances, as they are to be found in almost all the biographical essays.

Sainte-Beuve very often has something to tell his readers concerning the habits, the personal regimen, of his subject, his *manière journalière de vivre*. He esteemed such matters very illuminating and is fond of the anecdote that records details of habit and personal peculiarities.⁹ Most of the critics of Sainte-Beuve have noted and emphasized this. He notes, for example, that Michaud never cleaned his nails: "Il les avait fort noires les ongles";¹⁰ he tells of Magnin that he used to put his grandmother to bed at a certain hour every night. He tells anecdotes of Chateaubriand that would leave his admirer no shred of illusion.¹¹ Worth quoting is this, "qu'on me permette à ce propos une remarque sur le régime et la diète de Bernis; ce régime n'était pas ce qu'on pourrait croire." Though he had a very good cook and fed his guests very well, he himself "ne mangeait que des petits plats de légumes."¹² La Harpe's *gourmandise* is described,¹³ and also what Mme Mère du Regent liked to eat, sausages and sauerkraut, as it happened,¹⁴ and Talleyrand's regimen is given in detail.¹⁵ An interesting instance is that of the Countess of Albany.¹⁶ Examples of this nature can be enumerated almost without end, but it is not worth while merely to multiply them when it is clear that Sainte-Beuve fulfilled his own requirements in respect to showing the manner of the daily life of his subject.¹⁷ His, indeed, was a gossiping, human sort of a mind. He delighted in these realistic anecdotes,

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 428.

⁵ *Ibid.*, X, 244.

² *Ibid.*, V, 43.

⁶ *Ibid.*, IV, 59.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁷ *Nouveaux lundis*, VIII, 109.

⁴ *Ibid.*, IX, 341.

⁸ *Causeries du lundi*, X, 244.

⁹ Babbitt, *Masters of Modern French Criticism*, p. 182.

¹⁰ *Causeries du lundi*, XI, 486.

¹¹ Saintsbury, *History of Criticism*, III, 182.

¹² *Causeries du lundi*, VIII, 49.

¹⁵ *Nouveaux lundis*, XII, 125.

¹³ *Ibid.*, V, 135.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, V, 437.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, IX, 43.

¹⁷ Cf. *supra*, p. 38.

and one may fairly wonder if he were always conscious of a critical purpose when he was retelling them.

It will be remembered that there are several questions to be especially applied to women. Concerning any woman to be studied the critic should ask, Was she pretty? Was she ever in love? If she was religious, what was the determining motive of her conversion?¹ In the large majority of his essays on women Sainte-Beuve himself answers the first two of these questions, and occasionally he answers all three, as in the case of Mme Swetchine,² but he rarely does more with the third question than to say perfunctorily that she was a devout Catholic, or a sincere Protestant, or had no religion. Of descriptions of personal appearance there are many: "On se demande d'abord de Mme de Motteville, comme de toute femme, si elle était belle, et il paraît bien qu'elle l'était";³ this seems definitely to indicate that Sainte-Beuve always intended to ask this question about every woman he chose to study. Other examples are those of Mlle de La Vallière,⁴ Adrienne Lecouvreur,⁵ Mme de Latour-Franqueville,⁶ Gabrielle d'Estrées,⁷ Mme de Verdelin,⁸ Mme Dacier,⁹ Marie Antoinette,¹⁰ Mme Récamier¹¹—these are a few among the many that might be cited. As to the second problem in which Sainte-Beuve especially delighted, he practically always attempts to answer, when he is writing of a woman, the question whether or not she was ever in love. Examples are in the essays on Mme Swetchine,¹² on Julie de Lespinasse, whom he follows through two different love affairs,¹³ on Mme d'Épinay, who loved Francueil and later Grimm,¹⁴ on Mme Récamier.¹⁵ He makes much of the women who have been mistresses—Gabrielle d'Estrées, Mme de Maintenon, Ninon de L'Enclos, Mlle de Lespinasse—the list is lengthy. As to the last question, What was the determining motive of a woman's conversion? we have said already that he considered this in only a few cases; two are worth citing, Joseph de Maistre's conversion of Mme Swetchine which Sainte-Beuve says "est devenue littérairement un fait éclatant,"¹⁶ and that of

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, I, 213.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Causeries du lundi*, V, 172.

⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 453.

⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 203.

⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 69.

⁷ *Ibid.*, VIII, 403.

⁸ *Nouveaux lundis*, IX, 411.

⁹ *Causeries du lundi*, IX, 512.

¹⁰ *Nouveaux lundis*, X, 343.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, III, 13, etc.

¹² *Ibid.*, I, 213.

¹³ *Causeries du lundi*, II, 125 ff.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 200.

¹⁵ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 89.

¹⁶ *Causeries du lundi*, XV, 82.

Mme Dacier and her husband, who embraced Catholicism from motives of expediency and were suitably rewarded by Louis XIV.¹

There can be no question of Sainte-Beuve's own use of his advice that the critic should gather the testimony of a man's contemporaries as to his character and conduct. He scarcely ever overlooks or neglects this process. In fully three-fourths of the essays which permitted this procedure he uses it. Indeed this recording of contemporary testimony is so well known as a fundamental characteristic of Sainte-Beuve that one need only give references to a few passages in which it is effectively applied.²

The principle that a man should be studied in his literary descendants, his artistic children, Sainte-Beuve uses rarely. However, a few striking cases are at hand, first as to Musset, Malherbe, and Rousseau. M. de Musset has a host of imitators, who copy what imitators usually copy—form, surface, the "smart" tone, the sprightly gesture, the dashing faults, things which he himself might be able to carry off with a certain ease,³ they laboriously copy. They imitate his vocabulary, they repeat the names of his girls—Manon, Ninon, Marion—his jingle of courtiers and marquises. They took the form and the bad habit; but the fire, the passion, the elevation, and the lyrical power they could not borrow from him.⁴ One can detect the large amount of criticism of Musset which Sainte-Beuve managed to pack into this passage, concerned ostensibly only with his school of imitators. Similarly the disciples of Malherbe (Racan and Maynard) are examined as exhibiting the merits and defects of their master.⁵ Concerning the relationship of Rousseau with Lamennais, Sainte-Beuve says that passages in the *Songe du philosophe* of Rousseau recall to him passages in *Les paroles d'un croyant*, "Il n'y a rien là qui doive étonner; le maître, comme par anticipation, s'est mis cette fois à ressembler au disciple: cela arrive parfois aux maîtres. Rien ne ressemble à du mauvais ou à du médiocre Rousseau comme du bon Lamennais."⁶ He calls the authors of comedies, *proverbes* and *spectacles dans un fauteuil*, disciples of Marivaux: "Ils ont reconnu en Marivaux un aîné sinon un maître, et lui ont rendu plus d'un hommage en le rappelant ou en l'imitant";⁷ he passes in review the imitators of Chapelle and Bachaumont (Boufflers, Bertin, and others),

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, IX, 485.

² *Ibid.*, I, 199, 393; II, 191, 400, 423; III, 292; VIII, 131; XV, 167; *Nouveaux lundis*, I, 203; V, 395, etc.

³ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 305; V, 382.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 305. ⁵ *Ibid.*, VIII, 69 ff. ⁶ *Ibid.*, XV, 236. ⁷ *Ibid.*, IX, 379.

saying: "Ils ont tous cela de commun, de ne pas prendre la nature au sérieux, et de ne la regarder en sortant du cabaret ou du salon que pour y mettre une grimace et de l'enluminure";¹ Pontmartin's impoliteness and excess are reflected in a disciple of his, and he would be much embarrassed by "des grossièretés de style de ce marquis-là."² Poetry in 1852, Sainte-Beuve says, is too much given to imitation; it is easy to adopt the externals of a poet's manner, but then one is only a copyist: "On l'était, il y a quinze et vingt ans, lorsqu'on ramassait dans ses vers les épis tombés des gerbes de Lamartine; on l'est aujourd'hui quand on ramasse les bouts de cigares d'Alfred de Musset."³

In Sainte-Beuve's program for the biographical critic comes a very important step, that of summing up the author and placing him in his family of minds, applying to him his "appellation vraie et nécessaire."⁴ All the examples of his application of this rule are not so clear and true to type as that in the Chateaubriand article, where this master is called the prototype of his own René,⁵ but they are numerous and recognizable. The citation of a few will suffice: M. de Feletz "me représentait en perfection le galant homme littéraire";⁶ Étienne Pasquier is "un judicieux tempéré d'aimable";⁷ Montaigne is "notre Horace";⁸ La Fontaine is "notre véritable Homère, l'Homère des Français, qui le croirait? c'est La Fontaine";⁹ Carrel is "le Junius de la presse française."¹⁰ Jasmin "me paraît une sorte de Manzoni languedocien";¹¹ Halévy "à le définir poétiquement, je dirais: C'était une abeille qui n'avait pas trouvé à se loger complètement dans sa ruche, et qui était en quête de faire son miel quelque part ailleurs";¹² Gourville is "le type le plus complet et le plus parfait de l'homme d'affaires";¹³ the Duc d'Antin is "le parfait courtisan";¹⁴ Stendhal is named "un hussard romantique";¹⁵ Bossuet "c'est le génie hébreu, étendu, fécondé par le Christianisme";¹⁶ the rôle of M. Denne-Baron is summed up thus: "Il a été un pré-curseur."¹⁷ Other summaries are not so epigrammatic in tone and deal rather more with qualities and habits of mind. Two will be enough to

¹ *Ibid.*, XI, 50.

² *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 14.

³ *Causeries du lundi*, V, 387.

⁴ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 22.

⁵ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 452.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 371.

⁷ *Ibid.*, III, 268.

⁸ *Ibid.*, IV, 95.

⁹ *Ibid.*, VII, 519.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, VI, 127.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, IV, 322.

¹² *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 243.

¹³ *Causeries du lundi*, V, 360.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 479.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, IX, 303.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, X, 181.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 384.

show the tone of these. Of Adrienne Lecouvreur he says that her "principal mérite, au théâtre comme dans la vie, a été d'être la vérité, la nature, le contraire de la déclamation même. Ces simples mots résument le caractère de Mlle Lecouvreur";¹ and finally as to Leconte de Lisle: "C'est un contemplatif armé de couleurs et de sons, mais las et ennuyé du spectacle même, comme si regarder était déjà trop accorder à l'action."² As may be seen, some of these judgments and summaries are mere implications and adumbrations, but the literary phraseology does not conceal their real nature.

This placing of the author in his category or his class is largely determined by two things, the discovery of his *famille d'esprits* and the isolation of his *trait saillant* or his *faculté maîtresse*. It is necessary to distinguish between the *trait saillant*, the *faculté maîtresse*, and the *passion maîtresse* or *dominante*.³ It seems to be a matter of degree; the exaggeration of the *trait saillant* leads to its becoming the *faculté maîtresse* and the exaggeration to the point of madness of the *faculté maîtresse* leads to its becoming the *passion maîtresse*, which is no longer under control. An example or two of each will suffice. The *trait saillant* of Louis XIV was *le bon sens*,⁴ in Montluc it was the love of arms and war,⁵ in Raynouard it was the fact that he came from the south of France,⁶ Hamilton was above all an observer.⁷ The *faculté maîtresse* is the exaggeration of the *trait saillant*. Sainte-Beuve, being the student of character, the analyst, rather than the historian of action, preferred to deal with the dominant trait while it still was a quality of character rather than a principle of action. Therefore we find many studies of *facultés maîtresses* and fewer of *passions maîtresses*. The *faculté maîtresse* of Marie Antoinette in her last days resolved itself into mother-love, the determining motive of her every action;⁸ Horace Vernet had a genius for painting and could not have helped being an artist even though he had struggled against it;⁹ Molière started in the theater when he was the merest child: "La vocation l'emporte, et le démon fait rage en lui pour ne plus cesser, ... le théâtre avait besoin de lui, et il avait besoin du théâtre."¹⁰ Racine's leaning toward the theater did indeed pass over from a dominant trait into a *passion maîtresse*.¹¹ The *faculté maîtresse*

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 220.

² *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 249.

³ See *supra*, p. 41.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, V, 314.

⁵ *Ibid.*, XI, 56.

⁶ *Ibid.*, V, 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 96.

⁸ *Ibid.*, IV, 342.

⁹ *Nouveaux lundis*, V, 43.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, III, 59.

of Mme de Genlis was pedagogy: "Le goût d'enseigner ne doit point se considérer chez elle comme un travers, c'était le fond même et la direction de sa nature";¹ Rigault too "était né professeur; il était là comme chez lui, il y allait comme on va à la danse";² Eugène Gandar also shared this call to be a teacher.³ Fontenelle shared one thing with his great kinsman Corneille, intelligence: "Or, dans Fontenelle, cette partie d'esprit pur et de bel-esprit sans aucun reste de chaleur composa tout l'homme";⁴ as for Mlle de Lespinasse: "Ainsi tout pour elle se rapporte à la passion, tout l'y ramène, et c'est la passion seule qui donne la clef de ce cœur étrange et de cette destinée si combattue";⁵ and Bourdaloue felt inclined to the priesthood from his infancy: "Le mérite de Bourdaloue s'annonça dès l'enfance."⁶ A striking instance of the self-determination of a man's category Sainte-Beuve finds in Piron, who was, he says, a sort of machine for making epigrams: "Tallé-mant portait des anecdotes, Pétrarque distillait des sonnets, La Fontaine poussait des fables, Piron *éternuait* des épigrammes—*éternuer*, c'était son mot à lui. Eh bien! on ne retient pas un éternement."⁷ Sainte-Beuve's interest and faith in the *faculté maîtresse* are testified to by the fact that in about half of the essays on persons he isolates and discusses this quality, generally using it to place the person in the group or class to which he belongs. Of the *passion maîtresse* which amounts to obsession Sainte-Beuve cites several examples in giving his and Pope's theory⁸ but finds no occasion to study extensively this aspect of madness in any of the writers he takes up.

Of the conception of families of minds Sainte-Beuve does not make so frequent or so practical a use. It is not an idea that admits of scientific or even definite delimitations. It was indeed something that, while it was very real, remained a bit mystic and intangible. Still Sainte-Beuve had it in his consciousness, and again and again it rises above the threshold to figure in the analysis of the person under consideration. We have a few instances in which he definitely assigns a man to his *famille d'esprits*. Renan, for example, is given a place in the ranks of the high intelligences, among the Montesquieus, the Buffons, the Rousseaus of the French nature rather than among the Chaulieus, the Pirons, the Voltaires, assigning the one group to the Gallic, the other to the Celtic, strain: "Dans un pays comme la France, il importe qu'il

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 37.

⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 141.

² *Nouveaux lundis*, I, 259.

⁶ *Ibid.*, IX, 264.

³ *Ibid.*, XII, 341.

⁷ *Nouveaux lundis*, VII, 409.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 316.

⁸ *Ibid.*, VIII, 129.

viennne de temps en temps des intelligences élevées et sérieuses qui fassent contrepoids à l'esprit malin, moqueur, sceptique, incrédule, du fonds de la race; et M. Renan est une de ces intelligences."¹ The distinction in French literature between the Gaulois strain and the other, which he sometimes called the Celtic strain, he recurs to in other places. Of the opposite family to Renan is Béranger, assigned to *la race gauloise*: "Voyez Voltaire, Molière, La Fontaine, et Rabelais et Villon ses aïeux."² Saint Evremond "nous représente toute une race de voluptueux distingués et disparus, qui n'ont laissé qu'un nom: M. de Cramail, Mitton, M. de Tréville; mais il est plus complet que pas un."³ There remains the case of Cowper:

Il faut reconnaître les diverses familles d'esprits et de talents. ... Cowper est le poète de la famille, quoiqu'il n'ait été ni époux ni père. ... Les poètes ourageux et hardis comme Byron, les natures mondaines et vives comme Thomas Moore ou Hazlitt devaient assez peu l'aimer," etc.⁴

This completes the examination of Sainte-Beuve's critical practice as concerns those biographical, as it were biological, dicta which he formulated for the typical procedure of the critic who would make a scientific approach to his subject. We have seen that while he did not consistently and constantly apply all the precepts in any one essay, he had them constantly in mind, and in specific cases he found in one or more of these formulae, these avenues of approach, the road into the very heart of his subject.

It remains to investigate Sainte-Beuve's practice in the aesthetic, the artistic, the literary treatment of a subject. The principles upon which he himself says that a judgment should be based have been drawn together from his own work; these fundamental universal principles are taste, truth, tradition, logic, consistency, and, occupying a minor and by no means so stable a place, morality.⁵

But before examining his practice it would perhaps be well to find an answer to the question, Does Sainte-Beuve render judgments, does he habitually or often give or adumbrate a final appraisalment⁶ or advance an absolute evaluation? Seeking an answer to this question we will divide the essays into three groups on somewhat arbitrary lines: (1) essays dealing with periods or epochs, such as "De la critique littéraire sous l'empire,"⁷ "De la poésie en 1865";⁸ (2) articles devoted to

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 399.

² *Causeries du lundi*, II, 291.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, XIII, 455.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, XI, 186.

⁵ See *supra*, pp. 54 ff.

⁶ See *supra*, pp. 46 ff.

⁷ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 60.

⁸ *Nouveaux lundis*, X, 113.

the life and works of one man, which constitute the large mass of Sainte-Beuve's work and compose his characteristic production; (3) essays dealing with a single work, such as those on Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and *Salammô* and on Feuillet's *Sibylle*.¹

That he considers it possible to pass final judgment on an entire age is witnessed by the fact that in studying the "Mal de René" he says that there are times when a whole age suffers from some such spiritual malady, and he calls Baudelaire's sadness "le dernier symptôme d'une génération malade."² Three other sweeping judgments are striking: one on the seventeenth century, the eloquent passage beginning, "Saluons et reconnaissons aujourd'hui la noble et forte harmonie du grand siècle,"³ and leading up to the domination of Boileau in the literature of the age; the second passage is his comprehensive summary of the realism of Flaubert and Zola, pointing out its faults and shortcomings, condemning it on the grounds that it provides no place for transcending facts and therefore fails to be art;⁴ and, finally, his opinion on the state of poetry in 1852, saying that there is plenty of intelligence and skill but no inspiration.⁵

Conclusive and apparently final judgments upon persons, individual authors, or thinkers are common enough. A few of the most interesting examples will indicate the scope and certainty of Sainte-Beuve's judgments. Two occur on Béranger: "Pour ne pas abuser des termes, Byron, Milton, Pindare restent seule les vraiment grands poètes, et Béranger n'est qu'un poète charmant. Telle est ma conviction, que je viens de me confirmer à moi par une entière lecture";⁶ and the other: "Résumé! Béranger, comme poète, est un des plus grands, non le plus grand de notre âge ... dans cette perfection tant célébrée, il entre aussi bien du mélange. Comparé aux poètes d'autrefois, il est du groupe second et encore si rare des Burns, des Horace, des La Fontaine"; but they are higher in rank than he is because they never gave themselves over to merely partisan feeling.⁷ His summary of Rousseau contains both praise and blame:

Je n'ai pu indiquer qu'en courant dans l'auteur des *Confessions* les grands côtés par lesquels il demeure un maître, que saluer cette fois le créateur de la rêverie, celui qui nous a inoculé le sentiment de la nature et le sens de la réalité,

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, XIII, 346; *Nouveaux lundis*, IV, 31; V, 1.

² *Correspondance*, I, 220.

⁵ *Causeries du lundi*, V, 399.

³ *Causeries du lundi*, VI, 511.

⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 298.

⁴ *Nouveaux lundis*, IV, 136.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

le père de la littérature d'intime et de la peinture d'intérieure. Quel dommage que l'orgueil misanthropique s'y mêle, et que des tons cyniques fassent tache au milieu de tant de beautés charmantes et solides.¹

The judgments on George Sand, Merimée, Eugène Sue, and Dumas père, comparing them collectively and individually with Balzac and pronouncing their real valuation in the literary history of the future, are to the point.² So also is the appraisal of Malherbe as a poet who just missed being great: "Nous nous sommes convaincus que ce bon sens pratique n'avait qu'à s'appliquer à de dignes objets pour se concilier avec la grandeur"; he failed in this respect, but in others he was *un vrai maître*.³ Rollin is put in his proper perspective—he makes no appeal to our scientific generation, for we demand a medium of expression quite different from his and "celui du bon Rollin, certes, y échouerait. ... Dans tout ceci, en ressongeant au bon Rollin dont le nom revient encore par un reste d'habitude, je crois qu'il est impossible d'en faire autre chose qu'un honorable, un pieux et lointain regret."⁴ La Touche is set up as an awful example of the fate of the virulent critic; all his real merits are hidden by his violence.⁵ Paul Louis Courier

n'était pas un très-grand caractère, nous le verrons; je dirai même tout d'abord que ce n'était pas un esprit très-étendu ni très-complet dans ses points de vue. Il voit bien, mais par parties; il a de vives idées, mais elles ne sont ni très-variées ni très-abondantes: cela devient très-sensible quand on le lit de suite et dans sa continuité.⁶

There is a final appraisal of Rivarol: "Il n'était point un homme de génie, mais c'était plus qu'un homme d'esprit: il réalisait tout à fait l'idéal de l'homme de talent, tel qu'il l'a défini: 'Le talent, c'est un art mêlé d'enthousiasme.'"⁷ The *Pensées* at the end of Volume XI of the *Causeries du lundi* are replete with these completed judgments, too numerous to be quoted in full. Take for an example that on Ampère:

Ampère, comme érudit, manque de rigueur, et comme écrivain, de couleur. Avec cela, prenez-le comme curieux et causant de tout, il a bien de l'instruction et de l'agrément. ... Tout le feu d'Ampère se passe dans la recherche, et il ne lui en reste rien pour l'exécution. En cela, il n'est pas artiste.⁸

Barbier does not understand his own talent: "Il s'y noye ... ce qui me fait dire de lui: 'Barbier, c'est un poète de hasard.'"⁹ There are similar

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 97.

² *Ibid.*, II, 460.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, XIII, 423.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, VI, 281.

⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 491.

⁶ *Ibid.*, VI, 322.

⁷ *Ibid.*, V, 83.

⁸ *Ibid.*, XI, 478.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 448.

appraisals of Lamennais, Barante, De Vigny, Villemain, Lamartine, Génin, and notably of Thiers and Balzac; about the latter he is maliciously witty: "Balzac—le romancier qui savait le mieux la corruption de son temps, et il était même homme à y ajouter";¹ but Sainte-Beuve admired him as an artist.

In summary then, it is clear that Sainte-Beuve did judge authors, did offer a final appraisal, and was not always content to rest in his analysis. It is noticeable, however, that it is chiefly in the cases of the minor writers that he gives what may accurately be called a literary judgment; he took for granted the positions and the rights of the real giants—Goethe, Shakespeare, Horace;² positions so permanent and elevated as theirs needed no readjustment from the critic.

When Sainte-Beuve says that the critic's processes are based upon the principles of taste, truth, tradition, logic and consistency, and morality, he did not mean, of course, that he criticized first upon one of these principles and then upon another, so that the student of his opinion could discriminate and say, "This judgment is based upon taste, this upon tradition," etc. Rather are the elements of critical judgment mingled and interamalgamated into a unified whole. In these judgments which cover entire works of art, or the whole character of a man, it is the completely trained critical mind speaking, and one cannot isolate the specific principles and criteria, though it is more nearly possible to do this when details of matter and technique are under judgment. It is, however, not impossible to offer examples of judgments in which approval or disapproval has a dominant flavor of taste—for the matter of that, certain exceptional and striking verdicts may be based entirely upon taste, certain others may lean chiefly upon tradition, certain others make the appeal to truth. It is these more unmixed judgments that are offered with the warning that they are seldom quite unmixed.

Again we are following an arbitrary grouping: (1) judgments of whole works of art or a man's work as a whole; (2) judgments of detail or aspects of matter and technique.

Predominantly based upon taste, though always with tradition in the background, is a group of verdicts upon whole works of art. The opinion on Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is worth quoting because posterity has largely confirmed it:

Une qualité précieuse distingue M. Flaubert des autres observateurs ... il a le style. Il en a même un peu trop, et sa plume se complait à des curiosités ...

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 483.

² See "Precepts and *Procédés*," pp. 83 ff. However, he leaves a very definite idea as to his opinion of Balzac, who could certainly not be classed as a minor writer.

de description continue qui nuisent parfois à l'effet total. Chez lui, les choses ou les figures les plus faites pour être regardées sont un peu éteintes ... par le trop de saillie des objets environnants. Emma Bovary elle-même ... nous est si souvent décrite en détail et par le menu, que physiquement je ne me la représente pas très-bien dans son ensemble ni d'une manière bien distincte et définitive.¹

All the persons in *Madame Bovary* he says are bad and disagreeable, displaying not one touch of humanity or heroism; he condemns in the book its mass of unnecessary, disgusting, and unnecessarily disgusting, details: "Après tout un livre n'est pas la réalité même."² The same author's *Salammbô* comes in for substantially the same criticisms, summed up in what amounts to a final appraisal: "On l'a [*Salammbô*] beaucoup lu et on le lira; mais le relira-t-on? La lecture d'un roman-poème doit-elle produire sur nous le même effet que si l'on entraît dans un bataillon hérissé de piques?"³ The book is too difficult to read in its mass of details and its inhumanity of subject-matter. Flaubert by way of reply to this severe condemnation asked Sainte-Beuve if he was sure that he had not merely suffered a nervous revulsion from the subject-matter of the book;⁴ the critic made no public reply to this inquiry, but in consonance with what he has repeatedly said elsewhere we are sure of his saying in effect: "Après tout un livre n'est pas la réalité même." For even though things so revolting do exist in life, the presentation of them constitutes a violation of taste, that indefinable perception of unity, of simplicity, of dignity: "L'amour du sensé, de l'élevé, de ce qui est grand sans phrases." Elsewhere he exclaims without qualification: "Voilà un bon, un excellent livre."⁵ Of Raynouard's *Templiers*:

Il est impossible de prodiguer moins qu'il ne l'a fait les moyens nouveaux, et de tirer un plus heureux parti des quatre ou cinq mots ou hémistiches qui décidèrent du triomphe de sa pièce. Il avait été économe de sublime, mais, du peu qu'il y avait mis, rien n'avait été perdu.⁶

Roucher's poem *Les Mois* is "trop imbu des fadeurs sentimentales du siècle," etc.⁷ Michelet's study of Louis XIV and Le Duc de Bourgogne is marred by the haste of his manner:

La narration, proprement dite, qui n'a jamais été son fort, est presque tout sacrifiée. Ne cherchez point de chaussée historique, bien cimentée, solide et continue: le parti pris des points de vue absolus domine; on court

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, XIII, 351.

² *Ibid.*, p. 360.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, IV, 93.

⁴ *Ibid.*, IV, 435.

⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 315.

⁶ *Causeries du lundi*, V, 12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, XI, 133.

avec lui sur les cimes, sur les pics, sur les aiguilles de granit, qu'il se choisit comme à plaisir pour en faire ses belvédères. On saute de clocher en clocher. Il semble s'être proposé une gageure impossible et qu'il a pourtant tenue, d'écrire l'histoire avec une suite d'éclairs.¹

M. C. de Lafayette he counsels to cut down his *Poème des champs* and to perfect its technique: "Le dernier et huitième livre me paraît traînant et trop raisonné."² The *Crise* of Octave Feuillet has "trop de style ou de ce qu'on appelle ainsi: les personnages parlent trop comme on écrit quand on se soigne; c'est du style habillé et paré."³ "J'étais né, surtout pour être un professeur de rhétorique, tant ... je prends feu sur ces détails et ces misères de phrases,"⁴ he writes.

Discussions of passages and details on the basis of taste occur frequently, though quotable instances are not easy to isolate from their contexts. The following are typical: Of an expression on one of Sully Prudhomme's poems he says, "*Mordre l'inconnu* est dur; le goût, ce je ne sais quoi d'indéfinissable qui devrait être de tous les temps et de toutes les écoles, rejette de pareilles expressions";⁵ Mme de Girardin lacks taste completely and her work shows the result, as in this passage, *bienheureux séraphins, vous habitants des cieux*, etc., on which Sainte-Beuve comments: "Ces séraphins, qui tombent du ciel ou du plafond, viennent là comme, en d'autres temps, seraient venus les Amours et les Cupidons; on les introduisait sans y croire";⁶ as to Moreau he criticizes, analyzes, and concludes: "Il lui manque la pureté et le goût dans le style";⁷ even Chateaubriand in *Les mémoires d'Outre-tombe* disturbs this taste of Sainte-Beuve's;⁸ the article on Le Brun-Pindare is full of opinions on his verse, the critic using such expressions as *indécence d'adulation*, *exécrable*, *hideux*, and, on the other hand, *mollesse heureuse* to describe it;⁹ about Parny's poetry he employs these adjectives: "pure, tendre, égale, d'un seul souffle, d'une seule veine," and continues, "simplicité exquise, indéfinissable, qui se sent et qui ne se comment pas";¹⁰ Monselet's *La Bibliothèque en vacances* stopped just on the verge of being in bad taste, "un pas de plus, on est dans la gaminerie: le goût comme la justice conseillait et commandait

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 112.

⁶ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 391.

² *Ibid.*, p. 288.

⁷ *Ibid.*, IV, 65.

³ *Ibid.*, V, 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 437.

⁴ *Correspondance*, II, 169.

⁹ *Ibid.*, V, 160.

⁵ *Ibid.*, X, 161.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, XV, 293.

de rester en deçà."¹ Paul Verlaine is counseled by Sainte-Beuve to be a little bit more careful in versification; the critic saying of certain cesuras and *coupes* that "l'oreille la plus exercée à la poésie s'y dérouté et ne peut s'y reconnaître. Il y a limite à tout. Je ne puis admettre ce mot *retrait* qui décèle une mauvaise odeur," etc.² "Il lui arrive [à Pontmartin] de manquer de propriété dans les termes. ... Voyez un peu ... dans quel jargon métaphorique il retrace l'état des esprits au sortir du régime de la Terreur."³ A poem of Lacausade has "trop d'irritation. Je distingue entre l'irritation et l'indignation: celle-ci peut être une muse, non pas l'autre."⁴ The De Goncourt brothers in their study of eighteenth-century women used many technical and semi-technical words: "Un peu trop de scintillement, dis-je, et de cliquetis est l'inconvénient de cette quantité de mots et de traits rapportés de toutes parts et rapprochés. ... J'y voudrais parfois un peu plus de repos, un peu plus d'air, d'espace, le temps de souffler et de reprendre haleine."⁵ Sainte-Beuve praises the verse from De Vigny's *Eloa*, "*Monte aussi vite au ciel que l'éclair en descend*—est un de ces vers immenses, d'une seule venue, qui embrassent en un clin d'œil les deux pôles."⁶ Of a poem of Boulay Paty he says, "c'est trop de mots pour trop peu de sens."⁷ Such judgments as these, taken at random from thousands, have this in common, that they are all based on Sainte-Beuve's personal and instinctive taste and on that only.

The judgments based on *truth*, for which term he sometimes substitutes that of *reality*, are easier to identify and are abundant. This was partly due to the fact that Sainte-Beuve was a lover of "truth," a scientifically minded man, and partly due to the fact that it came his way to consider the realists of his own day and to examine their pretensions to truth. Such judgments are those he offers on the two novels of Octave Feuillet, *Sibylle* and *La petite comtesse*. Of the former he says:

Ma conclusion, c'est que les caractères, dans cette *Histoire de Sibylle*, ne sont pas vrais, consistants, humainement possibles; ils n'ont pas été assez étudiés ... sur le vif. C'est un livre trop fait de tête et d'après quelque inspiration demi-poétique et rêvée, demi-actuelle et entrevue, pas assez fondue ni assez mûrie.⁸

¹ *Nouveaux lundis*, X, 88.

⁵ *Ibid.*, IV, 6.

² *Correspondance*, II, 111.

⁶ *Ibid.*, VI, 411.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, X, 183.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

⁸ *Ibid.*, V, 36.

And he questions in the same spirit the latter work: "C'est inhumain, c'est dur et bien peu naturel. En fait, les personnages étant ce qu'ils sont et les choses ainsi posées et amenées, que se passerait-il dans le monde, dans la vie réelle et hors du roman?"¹ His dissatisfaction with those men and works which falsify life is outspoken and uncompromising; as for example on *Dominique* of Fromentin, which forces its psychology: "Ici ... j'oserai me permettre une critique: ... le lecteur n'est pas satisfait. ... Le roman n'est pas d'accord avec la vérité humaine, avec l'entière vérité telle que les grands peintres de la passion l'ont de tout temps conçue."² Even George Sand receives a shaft: "Elle ne calomnie jamais la nature humaine, elle ne l'embellit pas non plus; elle veut la rehausser mais elle la force et la distend en visant à l'agrandir";³ she, like Balzac and Eugène Sue, forces nature into a mold of her own making.⁴ He admires Feydeau's *Fanny* as being "une histoire vécue";⁵ and he commends Louis Veuillot for being "un peintre vigoureux de la réalité."⁶ Certain realists he condemns because he considers them false to life in the fact that they go out of their way to develop and accumulate whatever is sinister and disagreeable. He therefore condemns the De Goncourt brothers because, not being content with impartially setting down the crudities of life, they went deliberately seeking crudities, which is by way of being false to life and to art. Any undue collection of disagreeable matter is a misrepresentation of facts: "Ne forcent-ils pas le réel en le découpant de la sorte?" he questions, "ne lui donnent-ils pas un relief sans accompagnement ni contre-partie?"⁷ His kindred judgment of Balzac's *Cousine Bette* and other stories is famous: of *Cousine Bette* he says that her vindictiveness was so exaggerated as to falsify human nature: "Notre société gâtée et vicieuse ne comporte point de ces haines atroces et de ces vengeances. Nos péchés certes ne sont pas mignons, nos crimes pourtant sont moins gros"; when one has finished reading *Les parents pauvres* one has need of a little refreshment, "de se plonger dans quelque chant de Milton, in lucid streams, dans les purs et lucides courants, comme dit le poète."⁸ In other cases he condemned a too detailed treatment of fact, or an unnecessary fidelity to it, without unification or imagination. It is on this ground that he objects to Flaubert⁹ and Zola, of the latter of whom he says:

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵ *Ibid.*, XIV, 176.

² *Ibid.*, VII, 146.

⁶ *Nouveaux lundis*, I, 51.

³ *Causeries du lundi*, II, 461.

⁷ *Ibid.*, X, 401.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Causeries du lundi*, II, 459.

⁹ *Ibid.*, XIII, 362; *Nouveaux lundis*, IV, 35 ff.

"En réduisant l'art à n'être que la vérité, elle me paraît hors de cette vérité." In shutting out the ideal, art becomes false.¹ François Coppée, even, becomes unnatural in becoming too pessimistic.² Gautier he accuses of "une répugnance pour le réel proprement dit et une habitude de tout voir à travers un certain cristal";³ and Alfred de Vigny, too, "ne voit la réalité qu'à travers un prisme de cristal qui en change le ton, la couleur, les lignes," which leads him to "altérer et fausser l'histoire" in *La grandeur et servitude militaires*.⁴ *Le rouge et le noir* of Stendhal "manque aussi de cette suite et de cette modération dans le développement qui peuvent seules donner idée d'un vrai tableau de mœurs" and the personages "ne sont pas des êtres vivants, mais des automates ingénieusement construits," etc.⁵ C. de Lafayette's main fault in writing nature and farmyard poetry "c'est surtout d'avoir mal observé et connu son sujet," to have attributed to a hen the sentiments of a woman.⁶ On a detail of a poem of Mme Valmore, Sainte-Beuve says: "L'image ... est saisissante; on sent que c'est pris sur nature, et que ce n'était pas une fiction du poète";⁷ and he praises Parry in these terms: "La nature parle."⁸ An interesting light is thrown on his judgments with this basis by the fact that he heartily commends a minor, if not a third-rate, author, Fromentin, for approximating the synthesis of reality and the ideal, a combination which was his own ideal of true art.⁹ It is to the credit of Sainte-Beuve's honesty that he immediately adds that Fromentin does lean a little toward the side of idealization, forcing reality lightly in a romantic way. It is clear from this series of observations that the criterion of truth to life or reality was one of the most important of the principles whereby Sainte-Beuve formed his critical judgments.

When Sainte-Beuve judged a work or a man on a basis of tradition he might have in mind the purely classical tradition which during the whole of his third period he held in veneration, or he might have in mind the body of good usage and cumulating opinion built up through all the ages, not exclusively classical, but recording the usage and opinion of all authoritative writers. In certain cases Sainte-Beuve makes direct appeal to some classical writer whom he considered authoritative, to Horace for instance; or he compares directly the seventeenth-

¹ *Correspondance*, II, 314.

² *Ibid.*, p. 113.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, VI, 267.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 421.

⁵ *Causeries du lundi*, IX, 330.

⁶ *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 287.

⁷ *Ibid.*, XII, 159.

⁸ *Causeries du lundi*, XV, 294.

⁹ *Nouveaux lundis*, VII, 147.

century manner of describing nature with that of the ancients¹ and the nineteenth-century manner of C. de Lafayette with that of Hesiod and Virgil and Lucretius.² In other cases he assumes the authority of the rhetoricians and of accepted artists. In larger, vaguer matters he seems to have as his standard the practice of the ancient classical writers or of those later writers who imitated them. In minor matters, and matters of form, style, and technique in general, he brings all things to the bar of the seventeenth century.

He writes to a correspondent concerning his small esteem of Balzac: "In spite of everything, I have remained of the classical school, that of Horace and the singer of *Windsor Forest*."³ It is no wonder that the admirer of Horace and Pope should condemn his own generation for *démésure*, its lack of moderation, its inerudition. When he appeals for "truth" he is speaking for classical truth, faithfulness to typical and universal human nature; and in the name of this sane, tested tradition he begs for *le juste milieu* and protests against the violence of Hugo's romanticism, the brutality of Balzac's realism, the flabbiness of Chateaubriand's sentimentalism, the squalor of the naturalism of Flaubert and the De Goncourts, and the corruption of Baudelaire's consumptive muse. Merimée is compared and contrasted directly with the ancient writers of history as to his volume *Le faux Démétrius*. Cicero, Livy, Xenophon, and Caesar are quoted and Merimée is called "fidèle à l'esprit classique."⁴ Instances are almost innumerable of references to the classics and comparisons of French writers with them. Horace is compared with Béranger, with Boileau, with Montaigne, with Beaumarchais;⁵ Cicero with Foucault and with others;⁶ Virgil with George Sand, with C. de Lafayette, with Flaubert, and with the De Goncourt brothers;⁷ Theocritus with George Sand, with Léopold Robert, and with Fromentin;⁸ Lucretius with Seiyès and Cowper;⁹ Euripides with Racine;¹⁰ Homer with Fénelon, Bossuet, and Milton.¹¹ In French literature more narrowly it is the seventeenth century which provided him with a measure, and the writers of that epoch were his

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, XI, 46 ff.

³ Quoted by Babbitt, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

² *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 272 ff.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, VII, 378.

⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 289; VI, 503; *Nouveaux lundis*, VI, 250, 376.

⁶ *Ibid.*, III, 460.

⁷ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 352; *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 280; IV, 83; X, 409.

⁸ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 362; X, 429; *Nouveaux lundis*, VII, 130.

⁹ *Causeries du lundi*, V, 197; XI, 135.

¹⁰ *Nouveaux lundis*, VI, 46.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, II, 131, 340; XIII, 184.

standards of excellence; La Fontaine is compared with Lamartine, with Courier, with Etienne, with Cowper, with Nodier and Ducis;¹ Pascal with Napoleon, with Vauvenargues, with Bonald, with Beaumarchais, with Jouffroy, with Gibbon, with Schérer;² Racine with Chénier, with Ducis, with Cowper, with Parny;³ Retz with Condorcet, with Pellisson, with Mirabeau, with Walpole and Malouet;⁴ Bossuet with Monald and Montesquieu, among others.⁵

Sainte-Beuve makes use of the criterion of *logic and consistency* in a few cases. The case of Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* has already been cited; Flaubert's *Salammbô* is open to a similar attack when the author

décrit ... ce qu'on ne voit pas, ce qu'on ne peut raisonnablement remarquer. Par exemple, si l'on marche la nuit dans l'obscurité ou à la simple clarté des étoiles, on ne devrait pas décrire minutieusement des pierres *bleues* sur lesquelles on marche, ou des taches *jaunes* au poitrail d'un cheval, puisque personne ne les voit;⁶

and in giving to the barbarians who are attacking Carthage all the latest machines of war he is violating probability, since it would be impossible to procure them.⁷ A third instance will illustrate this minor point; it is that of a verse in *Les templiers* by Raynouard, where to enhance the pitifulness of the slaughter the herald tells of the large number who were slain: "Sire, ils étaient trois mille." Why, questions Sainte-Beuve, if they were so large a number did they surrender without resistance to the Saracen? Raynouard has overreached himself.⁸

The fifth and last criterion, that of *morality*, played a very minor part in Sainte-Beuve's critical practice. Indeed he was more often *advocatus diaboli* than the censor of public morals. His attitude is summed up in the words "ne soyons pas nous-mêmes plus rigoriste qu'il ne convient."⁹ It is not that he shunned the consideration of moral obliquities in the men he studied, but that he palliated them and glossed them over. Nevertheless he does at times condemn severely, as he did in the case of Talleyrand: "La vénalité, en effet, c'est là la plaie de Talleyrand, une plaie hideuse, un chancre rongeur et qui envahit

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, I, 25; VI, 357, 490; XI, 163; *Nouveaux lundis*, IV, 315, 404.

² *Causeries du lundi*, I, 182; III, 143; IV, 438; VI, 133; VIII, 297, 450; XV, 55.

³ *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 334; IV, 331; XI, 169; XIII, 165.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 270; XIV, 196; *Nouveaux lundis*, III, 299; IV, 16; XI, 200.

⁵ *Causeries du lundi*, IV, 435; VII, 65.

⁶ *Nouveaux lundis*, IV, 89.

⁸ *Causeries du lundi*, V, 12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, IV, 74.

⁹ *Nouveaux lundis*, V, 9.

le fond";¹ and he elsewhere speaks of his *corruption consommée*.² He deplores too great an appeal to the senses in *Mlle de Maupin*,³ and notices the *grossièreté* of the sixteenth century.⁴ The youthful *Organt* epic poem of Saint-Just is frankly condemned for immorality, and Sainte-Beuve comments that in its author "les vices honteux avaient précédé en lui les vices féroces; au fond de ce cœur il y avait une caverne toute préparée."⁵

There are a few points not provided for in Sainte-Beuve's formal declaration of critical principles, noted above in "Precepts and *Procédés*," which ought to be tested by an examination of his own practice; such for example as his choice of subjects. He declares that a subject should be of immediate interest to his readers, that it be timely. In most of the essays we find this principle of timeliness observed, a new biography, publication of correspondence, a new striking work of an artist; Sainte-Beuve's declaration that the critic must not be *prématuré ou retardé* seems to have been his own rule of choice.⁶

He points out the difficulties and dangers of judging a work which is far in advance of the public's acceptance, or in opposition to it; in this matter he himself was fearless, never hesitating to commit himself. He had many prejudices but no cowardices. So far from fearing to run counter to public opinion, he seemed to enjoy it and quite clearly often felt it his duty to do so. Chateaubriand was the idol of France at the time Sainte-Beuve wrote his epoch-making book attacking him, and he unhesitatingly pointed out the faults he saw in Hugo, in Lamartine, in Balzac, in Lamennais, when they were literary heroes at the height of their fame. He was equally bold in reviving and defending those to whom the public was indifferent or hostile. His first great work of criticism was a *Tableau de la littérature française au 16^{me} siècle*, defending the hitherto discredited and forgotten literature of the Pléiade. He came valiantly to the defense of Feydeau when his *Fanny* had stirred popular hostility, and he defended Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* under the same circumstances.

Sainte-Beuve enunciated as a practical working principle the rule that the critic must find out all that he possibly could about his subject, approaching it from every possible side before writing about it. One

¹ *Ibid.*, XII, 43.

² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³ *Ibid.*, VI, 286.

⁴ *Causeries du lundi*, VII, 44.

⁵ *Ibid.*, V, 338.

⁶ Interesting light is thrown on this matter by Sainte-Beuve's notes to M. Chéron, curator of the *Bibliothèque Impériale*, to whom he applied for the books needed for the various articles.

can say without reservation that Sainte-Beuve applied this principle uniformly in practice. His patience and application were indefatigable, his erudition enormous. His biographers tell striking stories of his scrupulousness as to facts, his meticulous care in spelling and in other matters which seemed very minor, his untiring pursuit of the truth and the whole truth. Whatever discoveries and reversals of opinion subsequent scholarship may have made, it can be maintained that from the point of view of his own age and of material available to him he was practically never mistaken in his facts and rarely in his opinions.¹

The critic, says Sainte-Beuve, even though he have a definite critical procedure, should ideally have no fixed ideas or a priori philosophical and social principles; he must be able to attack his subject without hypothesis, with no ready-made categories; he must pursue his examination with his eyes wide open, in that state of mind which Babbitt calls "the wisdom of disillusion" but for which one would like to coin the term "unillusion." Sainte-Beuve fulfilled in this matter his own requirement in a remarkable degree. He was, as so human-minded a man was sure to be, full of personal emotions, but he usually knew how to keep them from functioning as prejudices. He had examined, sampled as it were, many philosophies, he had sometimes exchanged his old philosophical lamps for new, but he had not committed himself; he sought no haven in any absolutism; he was a relativist, a pragmatist born out of season, allowing for all and any phenomena that emerged from the ever-flowing stream of things. But for all that Sainte-Beuve had no conditioning philosophy, no system of thought or school of social practice to which he committed himself; he was not always an impartial judge and at times he was a very severe one. His personal likes and dislikes color his judgment, particularly of his contemporaries. His attack on Hugo and his associated romanticists, in the regrettable article "Les regrets"² is a case in point; his hatred of Balzac appears in some of his articles on the great novelist;³ and his over-admiration of Mme Desbordes-Valmore could only be the result of a personal feeling.⁴ His mere dislike, personal as well as literary, of Chateaubriand, his opposition to Lamartine stand out in his papers on these two artists.

A very interesting injunction of Sainte-Beuve's, that the critic in his criticism should preserve the tone of his subject, is exemplified in his own works. It is fascinating to see his critique taking on the atmos-

¹ Léon Séché, *Sainte-Beuve* (Paris, 1904).

³ *Ibid.*, III, 69.

² *Causeries du lundi*, VI, 397.

⁴ *Nouveaux lundis*, XII, 134.

phere of the man that he is studying, as in the essays on Rabelais,¹ on Montluc,² on Joinville,³ in which his style takes on an antique flavor; that on Marivaux, where he catches himself up on this very thing: "Mais je m'aperçois que j'ai à me garder moi-même d'aller l'imiter en le définissant."⁴ There are passages in which the expression becomes flowing and turgid to suggest Lamartine, romantic and sentimental to create the proper atmosphere for Mme Desbordes-Valmore. This is all the more striking from the fact that he manages to keep the tinge of personality in his own *style moyen*, not changing it completely. On occasion he creates the tone of his subject not by any modification of his style but by adopting the ideas and habits of thinking of the person studied; as for example treating of Mme Genlis, who was in essence a teacher and a moralist, he says: "You see, in fact, that in speaking of her I imitate her and draw my moral."⁵

Finally, Sainte-Beuve advised copious citation as a conscious and deliberate procedure. He saw, in judiciously chosen quotations, the best analysis and interpretation of a man's work. He himself possessed, either instinctively or by virtue of long and rigorous training, the ability to choose the passages in which the core and the essence of the character under consideration was most completely crystallized. In every essay whose plan permitted it he gave in generous profusion those representative and illuminating excerpts in which a man speaks for himself. The large number of such passages is obvious to anyone who but glances at the essays. Their adequacy would have to be proved by an excursus too long and too complicated to be undertaken here. But one soon becomes convinced that Sainte-Beuve had the rare gift of adequate representative selection.

Though Sainte-Beuve did not publish even indirectly a system of rhetoric, a word must be said about literary style, since this matter loomed large in his opinion about an author, and since he practically never fails to comment on it. He was a clear and penetrating observer of the propriety of words, phrases, and images. He admired the clear, limpid, but colorful and individualistic, style of the classic school of French writers; he praises the *manière attique* above and rather than the *manière asiatique*, Hamilton rather than Balzac.⁶ Among the first requirements he made of style is that it should be individual, should

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, III, 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, IX, 362.

² *Ibid.*, XI, 56.

⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 37.

³ *Ibid.*, VIII, 495.

⁶ See "Precepts and *Procédés*," pp. 99 ff.

reflect the man whose vehicle it is. He institutes on this basis a remarkable contrast between Cousin and Chateaubriand: "Quand on approche de Cousin, on trouve un tout autre homme que celui qui se donne à connaître par ses écrits ... toute une moitié ... de ses qualités distinctives et de ses traits saillants n'est nullement représentée dans cette manière d'écrire." Chateaubriand on the other hand "écrit bien moins purement, ... mais comme son style est à lui! qualités et défauts!"¹ Chateaubriand's style is effective, it cuts, while the sublime manner of Cousin's long periods misses the mark. He contrasts Mme de Staël with Bossuet. She must be read by understanding eyes, the eyes of people who, for the magnificence of the ensemble, will ignore the faults of detail. She omits too many of the links of her thought and becomes obscure, so that when the Academy comes to make an analysis of her style for the dictionary they are much troubled: "On allègue tantôt le vague de l'expression, tantôt l'impropriété des termes ou le peu d'analogie des membres. ... Autant Bossuet, même ainsi démembré, gagne à tout coup et triomphe, autant Mme de Staël résiste peu."² This delight in a clear, exact style may help to explain his otherwise mysterious admiration for the Bishop of Meaux. Though Sainte-Beuve leaves no doubt as to his preference of the Attic above the Asiatic style, he was not blind to the florid beauties of Balzac, his praise of which is saved from fulsomeness only by a slight touch of irony:

J'aime de son style, dans les parties délicates, cette *efflorescence* ... par laquelle il donne à tout le sentiment de la vie et fait frissonner la page elle-même. Mais je ne puis accepter, sous le couvert de la physiologie, l'abus continuel de cette qualité, ce style si souvent chatouilleux et dissolvant, enervé, rosé, et veiné de toutes les teintes, ce style d'une corruption délicate, tout *asiatique* comme disaient nos maîtres, plus brisé par places et plus amolli que le corps d'un mime antique.³

An illuminating comment on Flaubert is this: "le style est très-soigné dans l'ouvrage de M. Flaubert, ... mais il est trop tendu, trop uniforme de tours. Les expressions, pour vouloir renchérir sur ce qui a été dit déjà, semblent forcées bien souvent."⁴ A kindred criticism, allowing for the difference in tone, he offers upon the style of Lamennais: "À chaque page, c'est un coup de tocsin perpétuel, il n'y ont que des alarmes." He cannot rest in the beautiful *style moyen* but must produce force and astonishment until his style falls into monotonous exaggeration, stunning the mind by repeated blows and finally destroying its recep-

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, XI, 470.

³ *Causeries du lundi*, II, 442.

² *Nouveaux lundis*, II, 332.

⁴ *Nouveaux lundis*, IV, 91.

tivity.¹ This is at the opposite pole from that which is Sainte-Beuve's ideal style, that of the seventeenth century, the style of the regency,² of Hamilton, of Mme de Sévigné, of Mme de Maintenon, who possesses "de l'ampleur, ... de l'abondance, de la récidive, une aisance libre et un cours heureux; mais ce qui me paraît toujours y dominer plus que tout, c'est la justesse, la netteté et une parfaite exactitude, quelque chose que le terme *d'ampleur* enveloppe et dépasse."³ After all, however, it is Retz whom he admires most: "Le style de Retz est de la plus belle langue; il est plein de feu, et l'esprit des choses y circule."⁴ He praises with enthusiasm Retz's use of words, of figures, his ease and grace, his complete freedom from effort. All told, he seems to find in Cardinal Retz the nearest approach to his full ideal of style. This style, as we may gather from the well-nigh innumerable notes on this subject, should be simple, straightforward, and clear, yet not unpoetic. He criticizes Guizot because his "style est triste et ne rit jamais";⁵ Necker because he is too abstract,⁶ while Stendhal desiring to secure clarity and limpidity has excluded all poetry and color: "ces images et ces expressions de génie qui revêtent la passion."⁷

It seems to us just in final summary to say that, keeping in mind the eclecticism and catholicity of Sainte-Beuve's mind and the practical and sane character of his critical procedure, remembering also that his dicta include principles from the old rhetorical and aesthetical as well as from the newer historical and scientific schools, his critical practice strikingly conforms to and embodies his theory of criticizing and his program of work. Without rigidity and formality, with great flexibility as to detail, he keeps his general scheme always in mind, both in appreciation and exposition of men and their work and in placing them in their types and classes and giving final judgments as to their values.

¹ *Cahiers*, p. 118.

² *Causeries du lundi*, I, 93.

³ *Ibid.*, XI, 116.

⁴ *Ibid.*, V, 60.

⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 321.

⁶ *Ibid.*, VII, 369.

⁷ *Ibid.*, IX, 317.

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